Title page

Work-Life Balance: To explore the factors contributing to the adoption of Work-life balance initiatives and the perceived benefits to older workers in an Irish manufacturing organisation.

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Abstract

Background: There are not many studies on the areas of work-life balance and older workers together.

Objective: This study aims to explore the factors contributing to the adoption of work-life balance initiatives and their perceived benefits to older workers.

Design: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with employees and HR/Operations managers to investigate the extent and relative influence of external, internal and individual factors on the adoption of work-life balance initiatives. They were also use to assess the extent of awareness and appreciation of work-life balance initiatives amongst older workers in an Irish manufacturing organisation. A survey was conducted with HR professionals to assess their extent of awareness and appreciation of work-life balance initiatives and to establish the benefits and barriers to older workers and identify the types of work-life balance initiatives availed of by them.

Settings: A medium to large Irish manufacturing organisation with locations in Limerick and Drogheda.

Participants: Three employees and two HR Managers and one Operations Manager, working within the manufacturing organisation. HR professionals were randomly selected through personal contacts within the HR industry.

Methods: A discourse analysis was conducted on the qualitative data from the six interviews.

Results: Three themes were identified as 'sub-factors' relating to the overall factors that contribute to the adoption of work-life balance initiatives, which were, culture/commitment, relationships and communication. Survey analysis revealed that 74% of HR professionals have informal work-life balance initiatives and 87% of respondents have no work-life balance initiatives particularly for older workers.

Conclusions: The findings suggest that the themes identified through the interviews are essential in the approval or granting of work-life balance in a manufacturing organisation. Also that significant effort should be put into promotion and awareness of the benefits of older workers.

Declaration

Submission of Thesis and Dissertation

National College of Ireland
Research Students Declaration Form
(Thesis/Author Declaration Form)

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Degree for which thesis is submitted: MA in Human Resource Management

Material submitted for award

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A Master of Arts in Human Resource Management (CIPD) HETAC – Level 9 (Top-up programme, part-time)

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Acknowledgements

In memory of

Agnes O'Donnell

4th October 1914 – 2nd February 2013

"Death ends a life, not a relationship"

Mitch Albom

Table of contents

Chapter 1   Introduction

Some of the common reasons for longer life are healthy life expectancy, where previously a male born in 1901 would be expected to live to 45 years, a female to 49 years. Recently, a male born in 1996 would live until 74 years and 80 years for a female (Worsley 1996). By 2002, life expectancy for older people in Ireland was the lowest in Europe, falling below the EU 15 and the EU 25 average for males and females (CSO Irish life tables 2002). By 2006 life expectancy had increased by 1.7 years for males and 1.3 years for females, or more simply explained, a 65 year-old male could expect to live 16.6 years and a 65-year-old female could expect to live 19.8 years (Stratton 2006).

It could also be due to a decline in birth rates, with the number of younger people declining and over 80's increasing, this leaves less under 25 years and more over 45 years (OECD 2006). Other reasons include the advance in drugs, clinical surgical treatments and standards in hygiene which all benefit life expectancy. Technical developments have also revolutionised industrial and commercial life.

Ultimately a person living longer is the governments, the individuals and the employer's problem. The government, employers and unions need to find ways to enable people who want to work to do it. If we all contribute to society and economy, we all benefit (Drury 1993). Work needs to change, or balance, to accommodate a new profile of population to include healthy older people alongside those who need support in old age (Moore, Tilson and Whitting 1993).

'Work-Life Balance' (WLB) may sound like a new term or phrase to describe a passing trend to some but the history of it goes back to 19th Century when factory workers sought a reduction in their working hours. When refused, industrial action was taken and employees left early, it proved that this had no impact on levels of output (Cole and Owen 1925). As research continued into factory workers it was discovered that other factors had to be considered in conjunction with working hours, such as motivation, morale, health and safety – fatigue and

concentration. This also led to the realisation that a limit on working hours and scheduled work breaks had a positive impact on production.

Around the 1950's and 1960's several factors were identified that could be argued as a base for the work-life balance term. They included, health and safety at work, international competition, equality and a flexible labour market. In the UK, collective bargaining was reaching its peak with a lot of debate over calculation of overtime payments, this led to 'productivity bargaining' which highlighted that overtime was paid at premium rates and that some workers were manipulating their hours and working time to suit themselves and boost their earnings. As a result a major overhaul of working hours and working practices was completed, this included flexible working arrangements, basic pay and overtime agreements (Gunnigle, Wallace, McMahon 2004).

When Ireland joined the EU in 1973 more changes ensued under the areas of employee's rights, equality and women in the workforce - maternity leave, minimum pay and collective bargaining. Along with the introduction of maternity rights and leave associated with it, employers had to manage and take into account their employees demand to commit to family life as well as work commitments.

In 2001 the European Social Policy issued a framework titled, 'Employment and social policies: a framework for investing in quality'. This argued that by providing a better work-life balance, and by 'increasing the attractiveness of work this may contribute to increasing the overall employment rate and the employment rate of women and older workers' (Crompton and Lyonette 2006).

According to Dex and Smith (2002), flexible working arrangements were identified as one of the most important means of balancing work and other commitments. One example of this came with the setting up of the BSA or Business Spouses Association in the late 90's following a lecture on stress management by Dr. Anthony Clare at the Irish Management Institute. Chairperson of the association, Rosemarie Ashe explained, "The economy is such that there are husbands out there working extremely long hours and it can

make for a very difficult life for some wives who are left feeling lonely and who lose touch with their personal lives," (Independent 1998). This agrees with Guest (2002) that arising from affluent societies were the excessive demands of work of senior executives that needed to be addressed.

Another example is from American news channel 'CNN' when their Chief Medical Correspondent Dr. Sanjay Gupta publicly withdrew his name from consideration of the role of Surgeon General of the United States under the Obama administration. His reasons were that his wife was expecting a third baby and he wanted to spend more time with his family rather then having to live in Washington DC and commute home on weekends only (Johnson and Chadwick 2009). This type of life/work decision has become more frequently heard of lately as the contract between employers and employee's is being redefined.

A more recent development in work-life balance and job flexibility came when a memo leaked from the head of HR Jackie Reses in 'Yahoo!' announced that it was implementing a ban on telecommuting or working from home to all employees who work remotely from June 2013. It was rumoured that Chief Executive, Marissa Mayer discovered that employees were not logging onto the virtual private network enough and they are to return to the office. Approximately 500 of 17,000 employees are 'remote only' workers and this isolation is now viewed as 'unproductive' and whose absence could be viewed as an opportunity to set up their own businesses. Maher is 37 and returned to work only two weeks after having her first child. Yet, she also is responsible for introducing free food and the recent building of a child centre for employees (O'Neill 2013). So maybe this change was really a measure related to retention of employees rather than productivity?

Johnson and Chadwick (2009) highlight further changes related to work-life balance by stating that "long gone is the company man who had a job for life from which he retired with a gold watch and rich pension." Stating that 'in today's workplace, professional's change jobs an average of 12 times during their lifetime' (Johnson and Chadwick 2009 p36). Their work also emphasises the need to engage new-age employees.

This study focuses on the less talked about area of older workers, rather than new age employees. The release of the CIPD report on 'Managing a healthy ageing workforce' in the UK (CIPD 2012) outlines several key facts like; the realisation that the UK is running out of workers and its older people are the main 'untapped' source of labour. A finding from the Governments Actuary's Department supports this stating that by '2020, 36% of the working population will be over 50' (CIPD 2012). Also, its population are healthier and living longer, which is leading to older workers saying they would work longer if they enjoy their work and could have more flexibility (McNair et al 2004 cited in CIPD 2012). Finally and most interestingly was the 54% of older workers that plan to work beyond the state pension age (CIPD 2010). While higher than the 38% of Irish respondents who intend to 'continue working after reaching the official retirement age in the current employment' (retirement Planning Council of Ireland 2011), they are both concerning results. Following a discussion with several recently retired people who are working and with these statistics in mind the decision was made to explore what the benefits and level of awareness is in Ireland towards older workers and its links to work-life balance.

To explore these two interlinked areas further, this study took a similar approach to the one used in the 'Work-life Balance 2007 Research Report' (McCarthy et al 2007) who conducted interviews with HR directors/managers and middle/line mangers and conducted a survey with employees. Similarly, interviews were conducted with employee's and HR/operation managers but from the same organisation – Irish Cement Limited. A survey was also conducted with HR professionals from various roles and organisations to gain a wider opinion of WLB initiatives and older workers.

Part of the research is set in the context of a manufacturing company called Irish Cement Limited (ICL). ICL celebrates over 75 years in cement production this year in its two locations, Limerick and Drogheda. A traditional manufacturing organisation for many years, it changed from a 'wet' process to a 'dry' process of production in the 80's, but it still retains a lot of that tradition in its culture. It now uses the most energy efficient dry methods in creating a range of high

quality cements to the highest standards. The company has currently over 200 employees and has a long-standing relationship with its pensioners, employees and unions over the years. It has experienced significant change in the past four years; a sharp decline in cement sales following the downturn in the construction industry, meant that changes had to be made in order to survive. These changes initially lead to an early retirement scheme for employees over 55 and with a defined benefit pension plan this option was availed of by many. But the sales and global economic situation continued to decline resulting in the temporary closure of the pension scheme. Following this, a voluntary redundancy package and a number of compulsory redundancies were required to ensure both plants remained open. In the background, were ongoing negotiations with unions on restructuring, leading to work practice changes, resulting in industrial dispute and also wage reductions. Today the company is exploring export market opportunities in the UK and Europe and remains the market leader and largest producer of cement in Ireland.

Chapter 2   Literature Review

Background to Work-Life Balance

As outlined in the introduction, work-life balance has its roots in the industrial revolution in Europe and today in some parts of the developing world (Guest 2002). Work-life balance was not an issue until the late twentieth century according to Crompton and Lyonette (2006), due to two 'core assumptions', that the standard worker was a full time male, and that women were 'unpaid labour' assigned to 'caring and domestic work' hence the 'balance'.

Parkes and Langford (2008) state that the traditional view of work-life balance was seen as an issue for employees, whereby the organisations would make efforts to improve their work-life balance by offering programmes to help them manage their home life, like child care or counselling.

Yet, since the late 1980's, Scase and Goffee (1989) in a study of UK managers found they were becoming less interested in career success, which was the traditional view, and more interested in a career that enhances personal lifestyles that are separate work roles. Guest (2002) points out that work-life balance more recently came to the forefront of 'contemporary debates' in affluent societies, whereby the excessive demands of work and senior executives were perceived to present distinctive issues that needed to be addressed. This is supported by, Sturges and Guest (2004), who argue that being able to achieve a 'balance' between home life and work life is an increasing priority for many people.

Johnson (2004) writes that, " the equation begins with each individuals lifestyle and that this governs all the work style issues" (Johnson 2004 p59). Therefore the balance, he continues, is really between a person's lifestyle and work-style and if there is any chance of engaging employees, employers must be considerate of this.

Poelmans in conversation with Kalliath and Brough (2008) mentions that 'work-life balance' is not the 'best' term. Stating that balance suggests, that "two elements are in equal equilibrium because they have the same weight" and

secondly "if you take away the slightest bit of one element the balance is lost" (Kalliath and Brough 2008).

Work-life balance has also been defined as a 'complex phenomena of adjusting working life and family life' (Tyrkko 2002), 'complex' being an important word as no doubt each person will experience balance in a different way.

<u>What does Work-life balance mean?</u>
In relation to the meaning of work-life balance, Grady, McCarthy, Darcy and Kirrane refer to work-life balance as, "…the sense of balance and satisfaction employees experience between their work / professional lives" (Darcy et al 2008 p3). Clutterbuck's (2003) explanation of the term is that 'work' relates to; "the time and energy people contract to expend to a third party in return for a defined reward…and 'life' as "the opportunity to achieve in a diverse range of contexts". And lastly, he defines 'balance' as "a state where an individual manages real or potential conflict between different demands on his or her time and energy in a way that satisfies his or her needs for well-being and self-fulfilment." (Clutterbuck 2003 p8)

Looking at it employment terms, Maxwell and McDougall (2004) refer to work-life balance as a range of flexible work arrangements framed in policies and procedures, including part-time working, temporary working, home and teleworking, job-sharing, flexible working hours, flexitime, annualised hours and career breaks to name some examples. Most people associate the word 'work' with their work place or where they are paid to do something. But some can include voluntary work, housework, and the recreational side of things in terms of a physical 'work out'.

A simple definition of work-life balance by the UK department of Trade and Industry is 'about adjusting working patterns regardless of age, race or gender, so everyone can find a rhythm to help them combine work with their other responsibilities or aspirations'. Also, Forum's (2003) report on 'Labour Market Issues for Older Workers' refers to Fisher's (2000) definition that work-life balance arrangements are "work arrangements, both formal and informal, that

exceed the statutory minimum and which assist employees to combine employment with their caring responsibilities and personal life outside the workplace". This is the only definition found to acknowledge both formal and informal arrangements.

A more detailed angle comes from Trinity College Dublin, their 'WiSER' webpage referring to Kodz, Harper & Dench's (2002) definition as; "a balance between an individual's work and their life outside work, and that this balance should be healthy… Work-life balance accepts that choice, control and flexibility are important in work, that personal fulfilment is important outside work and, further, that satisfaction outside work may enhance employee's contributions to work"

There are also some different points of view in terms of the structure of the term and therefore its whole perception. Johnson (2004) states that some authors argue that employees are putting themselves and their lifestyle ahead of work and that really the term should read; 'life-work balance' even stating that work-life balance is not working at all. "People – your employees – have come up with a different way of looking at it. It's called life-work balance. Life first, work later". (Johnson 2004 p3)

The other terms associated with the topic are 'work-life conflict' and 'work-life imbalance'.

Work-Life Balance in Ireland

'Work-life balance – The Irish National report', by Barry, Tiernan and Conlon (2005) highlights that WLB initiatives in Ireland are mostly informal and present in some sectors, mainly the larger organisations, while are absent in others. The report finds that while both employers and trade unions state their commitment to the promotion and pursuit of WLB initiatives and were involved in the National Framework Committee for WLB policies (set up in 1990 but now disbanded) – there is little evidence that any resources are being put in place to achieve a 'greater level of availability of quality working arrangements. It also highlights that there is a need for a diverse range of policies and initiatives in Ireland to

meet the needs of the various sectors of population and households. This report follows after Forum's report on 'Labour Market Issues for Older Workers' (2003), which refers to Work-life balance in its main recommendations. One recommendation is that the government in conjunction with IBEC and ICTU should put in place a strategy to pass on guidelines and training on work-life balance issues developed by the European Foundation.

The Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) who was part of the governments framework committee for Work-Life Balance commissioned a report titled 'Research on leave practices and options available to ICTU union members' (2009). This was due to 'limited research' carried out in Ireland on leave, flexible work arrangements and life long learning options form a union member's perspective. The report outlines how the availability of these options allows employees to 'maintain their employability and career progression', that without them, it would not be possible.

Another more recent study completed in Ireland titled, 'Work Life Balance 2007 Research Report' found that 75% of employees were "either slightly satisfied, satisfied or very satisfied with their work-life balance in general." (Grady et al 2008) This report involved interviews with HR Directors/managers, middle/line managers and also an employee questionnaire, including both public and private sectors. While the findings are detailed, they found that WLB is reported to be an important issue in the workplace at both management and employee levels.

Nationally, 'Work-life Balance Day' on March 1st is used to highlight the benefits of achieving a balance between work and personal life. IBEC supports this by encouraging employers and organisations "to engage in activities in connection with work-life balance day, that are aimed at highlighting work-life balance practices and the benefits that alternative working arrangements can provide to enterprises and employees". It also outlines some initiatives that employers are engaging in as (IBEC 2012):

- Health and wellbeing promotions;
- Seminars on time management and prioritisation;
- Inputs from local health centres,

- Night courses or local activity providers,
- Talks on eldercare or childcare
- Career based talks or presentations e.g. speed networking.

It continues to state that due to 'funding restrictions' there is unlikely to be any national promotion of work-life balance day.

Other promotion and awareness methods include the launch of Work Life Balance Ireland's website, (www.worklifebalance.ie) their tagline informs visitors to '*reduce stress in the workplace and improve your life*'. This also includes links to articles promoting the benefits of adapting a positive approach to work-life balance.

Reasons for Work-Life Balance

In order to understand the topic in more detail it is important to consider the factors that contribute to their adoption by organisations. The best practice management guide by Grady et al (2008) identify three categories; external/societal factors, internal/organisational factors and finally individual factors, that combine to create the pressure required to introduce work-life balance programmes. This guide will feature regularly throughout this paper with these categories used as the core contributing factors to the introduction of work-life balance initiatives. They are also referred to later in the research methodology chapter.

These factors are echoed in other studies by Maxwell & McDougall (2004) who identify the key levels of influence on work-life balance developments as being at the socio-economic level, the level of the organisation and the individual. Similar to Guest who claims there is fusion between these levels, but can also be considered individually. Guest (2002) points out that it's possible to identify a set of factors which have brought the issue of work-life balance to the forefront of policy debates. He identifies three sets of 'over lapping influences' as being: developments at work that might be seen as causing the problem of work-life imbalance, factors relating to life outside work that might be viewed as consequences of work-life 'imbalance' and lastly the factors concerning

individuals and their lives outside work. These, he states give rise to the need to 'address the challenge of work-life balance as a contemporary policy issue'.

A slightly different approach is put forward by Gambles et al (2006), who state three 'critical tensions', which are central to the way of 'harmonising paid work with other parts of life'. One is that paid work has become an increasingly dominant area within people's lives due to household bills and demanding work patterns. Second is the satisfaction people get from work (Gambles et al 2006 p4), together these divert time and energy away from the other areas of our lives. This leads to time and energy to catch up with family, friends and loved ones, which is "…crucial for individual and societal well-being." The third element they highlight concerns the roles of men and women and the way in which they interact and negotiate their roles.

All these link to how their 'paid work roles' and 'private life' combine. These choices are usually dictated by the assumptions of what each should do and how they interact with each other. Keeping this in mind, several overall factors have been highlighted as the reasons why, or pressures that encourage organisations to introduce work-life balance initiatives;

Grady et al (2008) identify one of the most influential factors or reasons over the past decade and up to 2008 as being; the changing structure of work, which was primarily due to the surge in economic growth but has also, had a major impact on society. Russell, O'Connell and McGinnity (2009) attribute the rapid growth from the late nineties until approximately 2008 to the increased number of women returning to the workforce, which, in turn led to a 'higher proportion of families where both parents were at work or households that have a single working parent'. A higher number of women from all classes of the workforce engaged in 'paid employment' is also referred to by Guest (2002). Similar to Ireland, Maxwell & McDougall (2004) refer to research by (Kirkton and Greene 2000) that the increasing number of women in the labour market over the past few decades in the UK has been 'an important change in the social and economic fabric'. Sexton (2002) even expects the trend to continue to 2015 where women will account for 45 per cent of all employment.

Whilst this change was primarily by women, it has also been made available through the use of advances in technology. "This recent increase tends to include a new type of worker who tend to choose to work in atypical ways and to use technological advances to their advantage" (Grady et al, 2008 p9). Along with information technology and its uses Guest (2002) points out there is also the 'information load' which leads to the need for response, emphasis on the quality customer service, the implications for constant availability and the pace of change and its related adjustments. This all demands time and increases pressure, which as a consequence leads to employees working longer hours.

Longer working hours have raised concerns that the quality of home and community life is deteriorating. Guest (2002) suggests this may be due to the growth of single parent families, a lack of social resources and facilities and the 'privatisation' of family life. Other external societal factors not discussed in this report include an increase in the number of fixed-term contract workers, part-time employment, temporary workers and the move from unskilled to skilled workers.

Internal Organisational Factors

The three internal organisational factors highlighted by Grady et al (2008) related to the rise of work-life balance are; Human Resource Management, Increased Productivity and the 'War for talent'.

Ollier Malaterre's (2009) research highlighted five main areas that explain why organisations introduced work life initiatives. The five factors were 'employers - state legitimacy in the non-work sphere of life', 'industrial relations and unions' stance towards work-life practices', 'the complexity of the legal framework', and the 'framing of work-life as a business or a social issue'. The other factor highlighted was the 'awareness of work-life issues within HR departments'. This will be referred to again later in the study. In the summary of the findings, she states that 'most French HR have a weak knowledge on work-life practices' and that organisations are unaware of what other 'high-tech' companies do.

In terms of increased productivity, the recent economic recession in Ireland and Europe along with other countries worldwide has created an ever-increasing demand for productivity and a reduction in costs. Due to advances in technology (Guest 2002) and developments in trade agreements including online sales, the marketplace has become global and competitive. Organisations have had to find ways to motivate their staff and ultimately increase productivity of their employees. The availability of work-life balance initiatives is one of many ways, which contribute towards increasing productivity of employees (Grady et al 2008).

As organisations compete for market share they also must compete for high calibre employees. Parkes and Langford (2008) state that 'war for talent' has shifted the arguments for work-life balance as organisations respond to individual employee's needs to a broader business case (Russell 2002). Yet De Cieri et al (2005) argue that organisations wishing to create a competitive advantage must 'develop the capability to attract, motivate and retain a highly skilled, flexible and adaptive workforce' by having human resources and work-life balance strategies that 'cater for diverse needs of the workforce'.

Individual Factors

The individual factors associated and outlined by Grady et al (2008) were the 'intensification of work' and 'employee expectations'. The intensification of work centres around the availability to connect and access to knowledge that has enabled today's employees and organisations to be accessible nearly 24 hours per day seven days per week.

Work can now be completed at a faster pace with email and smart phones allowing people to access work at any time and location. According to Grady et al (2008) this has all lead to an intensification of work and has a knock on effect into all industries and sectors of business and occupations. Along with the demands for workers to become more productive, flexible and available they also have to deal with their roles becoming more complex (Guest 2002).

The traditional view (Scase & Goffee 1989, Parkes & Langford 2008) of the workplace being just for work has been broken and now due to the advances in technology such as company paid smart phones with high speed wireless internet access – employees can now access emails anytime anywhere. These advances have resulted in organisations upgrading their systems to increase productivity, along with the pressure on employees to be more motivated and productive has lead to longer working hours in order to cope with new work practices and market demands. As roles have intensified employees have begun to demand tat their organisations introduce systems and initiatives which employees can achieve their work-life balance.

Employee expectations focuses on the expectations of the recent entrants into the workforce of 'Generation Y' (born 1980 – 2000) Their expectations are very focused on the nature and type of work they are willing to do, because they are known as the generation that are 'working to live rather then living to work', compared to generation X (born 1965 – 1979) before them who were the opposite. This has resulted in organisations providing a challenging working environment with options for employees to develop heir skills and allow their lifestyle suit their working lives. Lewis et al (2002) highlight that young people now emphasise the achievement of work/life balance more than their predecessors.

Work-Life Balance and Older Workers

An area of work-life balance, which is less discussed (Grady et al 2008), is that of older workers and the number of older workers in the workforce or available for work. Research by Landa, Jorge and Paul (2009) agree, stating that this remains largely understudied, 'despite its potential on health, productivity and retirement decisions'. This section of literature review looks at older workers and their perceived benefits. In this paper older workers are defined as 55 – 64 years of age.

While there has been plenty of work-life balance studies, most have focused on children and young workers. Canada seems to be leaders in the area of older workers but mainly in the area of elder care (Landa et al 2009). A survey of

retirees conducted by the Retirement Planning council of Ireland (2011) stated that 38% of the respondents intended to continue working after reaching the official retirement age in their current employment. Of these 46% intended to find part-time work and 12% intended to start their own business. Therefore it is important to gain a better understanding of this area because conflict between work-life balance and older workers has been associated with negative health and productivity (Duxbury & Higgins 2003). Also research shows that work-life balance plays an essential role in older worker's retirement decisions (Johnston 2004).

In Ireland, a study by Stratton (2006) under the Senior Select Retain & Retain (SSRR) initiative outlines that Ireland was one of the few countries in Europe to reach the Stockholm target of 50% employment of older workers (aged 55-64) by 2010. This followed the massive economic growth that Ireland experienced during the nineties. But Stratton (2006) also states that even with its positive approach to equality legislation, in terms of age discrimination, he criticises the fact that "little has been done to encourage older workers to remain in the workforce or increase their employment opportunities" particularly if made redundant (Stratton 2006 p1).

Stratton (2006) also highlights a number of barriers to participation of older workers, including lack of flexible or part time hours, lack of appropriate skills and education, low take home pay and concerns about reductions in pensions income. Age discrimination was also one of the main barriers. If addressed these will likely see an increase in the calls to introduce greater flexibility in recruiting older workers. It will also introduce higher awareness of their working arrangements, leaving organisations with the task of ensuring that they have work-life balance initiatives targeted at retaining and attracting older workers.

Grady et al (2008) state that it is 'imperative from a societal perspective' that new ways are found to entice older workers to remain in the workforce for longer. This can be achieved by organisations providing more flexible working initiatives like flexitime and reduced working hours.

A global Manpower survey (2007) showed that 67% of Canadian employers did not have a strategy in place to recruit or retain workers aged 50 years plus and only 24% had implemented retention strategies to keep older workers in the workforce. Compared to Japan where 83% of respondents were proactively working to retain older workers.

In manufacturing, the job of finding qualified employees is even harder according to one American organisation; "The image of manufacturing is unattractive to younger generations" (Milkos 2006). But some companies have reacted to this, like Pitney Bowes Inc, a 2004 winner of 'AARP's Best Employers for Workers over 50 Award', has a phased in retirement programme and 'snow bird' programmes which allow employees to migrate in the winter and return in the spring. An ergonomics committee set up by battery manufacturer, Duracel has improved automated loading and unloading stations, work height adjustments and redesign of workstations with job rotation to suit their older workforce (Katz 2007).

Farrell (2012) states that 'the trend towards staying in the labour force took hold about two decades ago'. He continues by stating that the transition towards retirement is increasingly complex as people forge different work paths in their older years, including downshifting to part-time work. America has 77% of workers aged 55 years or older in full-time employment and 23% in part-time employment. This is most likely due to a combination of people living longer and the qualifying age to receive full social security benefits set to reach 67 years by 2020 (National Healthy Worksite 2012).

Demographics also play a major part with the proportion of people in Ireland aged 65 years or older set to increase by 60%, from 436,001 in 2002 to 698,00 in 2021 (Connell and Pringle 2004). Similarly in New Zealand the 'half the New Zealand labour force will be older than 42 in 2012'. This is due to 'increased labour force participation rates and an ageing population the labour force in the age group 65 plus will be three times larger in 2026 then it was in 2001 (National Labour Force Projections 2007).

Maxwell & McDougall (2004) state that the primary drivers of work-life balance were political and economic. Stratton (2006) states that Ireland has had very successful employment policies in previous years, which enabled workers to participate more in the workplace. It has also protected rights of workers through its Equality legislation. Farrelly (2013) states the participation of older workers in the work force is dependent on several factors, including; national policy, the pension framework, employment legislation, wage policies, health care, current employers policies and education and training.

In looking at legislation, Ireland has progressed in the awareness of work-life balance with a government webpage facilitating a 'WLB - Frequently asked questions'. This guides both employers and employees with broad questions and answers. There is also a guide to 'Non Statutory Work Arrangements' for flexible hours, leave, location and reduced working time. (www.djei.ie) Yet there seems to be little or nothing regarding older workers.

One recent change by the Irish government means that from January 2021 the state pension age is increasing to 67 years and from January 2028 it is increasing to 68 (www.welfare.ie). While most employers in Ireland still have the retirement age set at 65 years, the government's changes may see demands for employees to remain on longer in the workforce. In the UK the Equality and Human Rights Commission was successful in abolishing the default retirement age earlier in 2013 through the Equality Bill. Research behind this by the National Institute of Economic and Social Research showed that if working lives were extended by 18 months it would add £15 billion into the British economy (The Equality Rights Commission 2010).

The Green Paper on Pensions (2007) highlights that an important strategy to coping with ageing population is to mobilise the labour supply. Winding down and stepping down are two ways of facilitating this. It also recommends facilitating the employment of older workers by providing flexibility in the retirement age by creating incentives for employee's who want to remain in the workforce after the age of 65. Other options suggested are to facilitate a gradual

move to retirement by changing working arrangements, increasing contributions towards full pensions and tighter conditions for early retirement.

In terms of national policy, the current coalition government have recently published the 'National Positive Ageing Strategy', which highlights a vision to develop an age friendly society. However, Age Action Ireland, while welcoming the publication is concerned as to how the strategy will be implemented and who will take responsibility for its implementation (www.ageaction.ie). The report does include measures relating to older people participating in employment as highlighted by Farrelly (2013) but she also notes that the Government does not commit to completing and implementing it.

Two of the four main recommendations from the 'Forum Labour Market Issues for Older Workers' (2003) report, refer to 'Employer attitudes to Older Workers' and 'Work-life balance'. In the first it recommends that the government along with IBEC and ICTU should take a more active approach to promoting the benefits of training of older workers. It also recommends that IBEC and ICTU should disseminate good practice in supporting older workers in relation to flexible working, reduced working hours and retraining. The recommendations under work-life balance that refer to older workers relate to health and the provision of a national workplace health coordinator with specific regard to older workers. It also recommends that any opportunities for 'downshifting' should be made available to older workers in the workplace.

The EU has recognised the importance of the ageing challenge for many years and it is currently the main policy of 'Europe 2020'(Farrelly 2013). Also, a Eurofound report (2011) concluded that older workers are increasingly encouraged to work longer and beyond the statutory retirement age. It outlined several incentives, flexible working hours, financial incentives, work organisation interventions and role assignments. This is supported by the Equality and Human Rights Commission (2010) study in the UK, where older workers informed the Commission that 'flexibility in hours and locations' was the main reasons for them to work longer. Citing the reasons to get a job as

'trying to balance caring responsibilities and health' and 'a greater availability of part-time or flexible jobs'. (Equality and Human Rights Commission 2010)

<u>Work-Life Balance and perceived benefits of Older Workers</u>
An older population represents an opportunity to fill gaps of talent shortages, such as the 'intermediate level' skills and knowledge resources. The older worker is in a good position to avail of these tasks, which are lower in responsibility, less stress and greater flexibility (Stringfield 2007 p11).

By accommodating the needs of older workers, an employer retains a valuable knowledge base, fills the skill shortage and retains employers for longer, all of which assists in a favourable return on investment. A state services commission survey titled 'Facing an Ageing Workforce Information for Public Service HR Managers' (2004) outlined several advantages to having an ageing workforce. Including the ability to cope with life's pressures and problems better, wisdom and judgement that can inform decision making processes and valuable experience driven knowledge rather than formal training. The results also showed that work-life balance and flexible work practices were seen as the most important factors for respondents managing an ageing workforce with remuneration being the least important.

Other reasons for being positive about older workers include;
- Skills shortages – which, unless employers take a more realistic approach to age certain types of jobs will take longer to fill, to the detriment of everyone.
- Waste – imposing age bars on recruitment means the best person for the job may be missed.
- Professionalism – age discrimination is not compatible with good recruitment practice. (Age Works 1994)

An OECD report (2006) on age and employment policies highlighted several reasons why older workers should matter to employers, the return on investment means longer service with the employer resulting in an investment in training and

experience which are expensive to waste. The employer also is maximising recruitment potential, if older workers are excluded the employer ignores large proportion of available talent and misses opportunities to acquire the best people and necessary skills. It suggested that older workers would promote diversity as a vital part of the mix in a well-balanced workforce, and that they can be the 'memory' of the business, who don't ignore lessons of experience. Lastly, they can be a steady influence when morale is volatile and threatened. Reputation is also listed, as employers want to be regarded by present, future and past employees as 'good employers', by looking after employee's needs at all stages.

Farrell (2010) gives an example of the benefits of older workers with the experiment by carmaker BMW at one of its plants in Germany. The management noticed that the average age of workers was set to increase from 39 years in 2007 to 47 years in 2017. In order to comprehend how this would affect productivity they modified an assembly line and manned it with a selection of workers from the 2017 group. They made 70 small changes, mainly ergonomic, such as adding barbershop chairs and orthopaedic shoes for comfort, which only cost $50,000. This resulted in increased productivity of 7% in one year and zero defects – bringing it in par with production lines with workers who were younger.

Yet there are also some barriers to having older workers, as outlined in a State Services Commission Survey (2004), like health problems, being averse to change and limiting career opportunities for younger staff. Managing performance issues – when linked to age related impairments, loss of key skills in a short time frame and a reluctance to accept peer reviews of their own work.

In America, according to research by the Ageing of the American Workforce (2012), that even though employers have an overall positive approach to older workers and are willing to employ them, they face several barriers. These include, 'reduced employment opportunities, and decreased training participation, increased discrimination, increased disparities in health and more challenging workplace conditions' (National Health Worksite 2012).

In summary, the difficulty offered by J. Joerres CEO of Manpower Inc. is that older employees with talents that companies want to retain tend to have the financial flexibility and employment options to retire or downshift to more flexible work arrangements. He continues stating that "the best way to attract and retain older workers is to have jobs they want, and what they want is flexible, part-time jobs that interest them".

In New Zealand many older workers express the need to continue working. Fulfilling work offers greater flexibility, to have the option of shorter working weeks, work from home and take longer holidays (Stringfield 2007).

In conclusion, it is the combination of the external societal factors, the internal organisational factors and the individual factors that contribute to the adoption of work-life balance policies and initiatives. This in turn assists in creating a working environment, which supports the organisations strategic objectives and gains a competitive advantage over its competition. Each of these factors then lead to individual elements that create pressure in organisations to develop and introduce work-life balance initiatives. Some essential factors that account for external and societal factors include the recent growth (and downturn) in the economy. Changes in technology have also had a major influence on the when and where work can take place. This means that the traditional view of having physical boundaries between the two is gone and many see work and home life as integrated and can take place at either location. Therefore the meaning of work-life balance is evolving and can vary from person to person (Maruyama, Hopkinson and James 2009) and organisation to organisation. The knock on effect has implications as to how work and working time is structured in organisations and therefore generates requests from employees and older workers for more family friendly and flexible working initiatives to be provided by their organisation. Organisations should also ensure that they pay attention to the basics of the employment relationship and not to loose these in the process of introducing new initiatives (Conway and Monks 2008).

Chapter 3   Research Methodology

Research aims and objectives/hypothesis

The overall topic is in the area of Work-life balance. As this is quite a broad area the primary research objective is to explore the factors contributing to the adoption of Work-life balance initiatives and their perceived benefits to older workers in an Irish manufacturing organisation. This is further elaborated by the research sub-objectives, which are outlined below.

In light of the analysis the aim of this study is to further explore four sub-objectives to the overall research topic. This will allow a clearer understanding as to the particular area under this topic. The following research questions have been posed in order to act as a funnel from the overall objective down into more specific areas.

1. To investigate the extent and relative influence of external, internal and individual factors on the adoption of Work-life balance initiatives in an Irish manufacturing organisation.

As referred to in the literature review, following the '2007 Work-Life balance in Ireland' study conducted and completed by National University of Ireland Galway (McCarthy and Grady) a best practice management guide titled 'WLB: Policies & Initiatives in Irish Organisations' was published by Grady, McCarthy, Darcy and Kirrane (2008). This draws on the study from the previous year and identifies the main factors that contribute to the adoption of work-life balance initiatives as external/societal factors, internal/organisational factors and finally individual factors. A separate breakdown of the factors is given by Guest (2002) he also identifies three sets of 'over lapping influences', as being; developments at work that might be seen as causing the problem of work-life balance, factors relating to life outside work that might be viewed as consequences of WL imbalance and lastly the factors concerning individuals and their lives outside work. Research objective 1 will attempt to explore this variable in an Irish manufacturing organisation.

2. To assess the extent of awareness and appreciation of WLB initiatives amongst HR professionals.

In a study conducted by Ollier-Malaterre (2009) the author assess the gap in workplace practice adoption between the US, UK and France and using in-depth interviews. The results highlight five main factors that explain the adoption of organisational WLB initiatives. The five factors were; 'employers-state legitimacy in the non-work sphere of life'. Second, 'industrial relations and unions' stance towards work-life practices', the third factor is, the complexity of the legal framework. The fourth factor highlighted was the 'awareness of work-life issues within HR departments'. Fifth, framing of work-life as a business or a social issue. Research objective 2 above will attempt to test the fourth factor with individual HR professionals and separately with employees of a manufacturing organisation.

3. To establish the benefits and barriers to older workers and identify the types of work-life balance initiatives availed of by them.

Stratton's (2006) study into 'promoting choices for older workers' and the Irish governments (2007) 'Green paper on pensions' highlight a number of barriers to the participation of older workers in employment. A study completed by van Dalen, Henkens and Schippers (2008), which used comparative surveys from four European countries, asks how employers respond to the challenges to an ageing workforce. This objective attempts to compare these findings against the benefits, barriers and types of initiatives availed of by older workers.

4. To assess the extent of awareness and appreciation of WLB initiatives amongst older workers in an Irish manufacturing organisation.

Similar to research objective 2 above, this objective will attempt to test a similar variable but directed at 'older workers' and their level of awareness and appreciation of WLB initiatives amongst their peers.

Research Methodology

<u>Introduction</u>

In order to explore the objectives and gain a wider opinion and deeper view into the topic of work-life balance, semi-structured interviews and a survey were conducted. The semi-structured interviews were all conducted with employees and HR/operations of Irish Cement Limited. The survey was conducted with HR professionals from all different organisations and backgrounds. The reason for doing this was to discover the views of a traditional, enclosed manufacturing organisation towards WLB and older workers and then compare them to the views of HR professionals from a variety of different organisations and disciplines. Similar in a way to a benchmarking exercise, it is hoped that through these mixed approaches and findings that the analysis will reveal something possibly worthy of further research or general discussion.

<u>Research Design</u>

A qualitative approach was taken to the objectives outlined. The research purpose for this section of the study would be classified as explorative, as it is the first time a study on Work-life balance has been completed in the organisation. Explorative studies, according to Saunders et al (2009 p139) are useful if one wishes to clarify its understanding of a problem, "such as if you are unsure of the precise nature of the problem".

Combinations of inductive and deductive approaches were taken for this study. Saunders et al (2009) highlight that combining research approaches is 'perfectly possible' and in their experience is "often advantageous to do so" (Saunders et al 2009 p127). This report aims to answer the research questions that were derived or deduced in advance of the literature review. (Turley 2013)

The inductive approach was used, as it is the best way to find out more about the feelings of ICL employees and executives and their views and opinions of WLB initiatives and older workers.

The research instruments chosen as the best way to source the data and information required to answer the research objectives was through the use of semi-structured interviews and a survey questionnaire.

The use of semi structured interviews aims to address the first and fourth research objectives as highlighted in the research questions above. Saunders et al (2009) refer to semi-structured interviews as using 'a list of themes and questions, which may vary from interview to interview'. The second and third objectives have been addressed through the use of a survey questionnaire to HR Professionals.

The research strategy used is based on phenomena using a manufacturing organisation called Irish Cement Limited (ICL). ICL is the leading cement manufacturer in Ireland employing over two hundred people. It has locations in Counties Louth and Limerick and celebrates its seventy-fifth year in operation in 2013. Platin Works, located in Drogheda is one of the most energy efficient plants in Europe and has recently introduced state of the art alternative fuels, which aims to reduce to its carbon emissions by using recovered waste as fuel, therefore reducing its consumption of fossil fuels. Due to the recent economic downturn and subsequent slow down in construction spend and activity, the market for cement has significantly declined. As a result the company, which is steeped in tradition and unions, has experienced significant changes in the past four years, including restructuring, redundancies, industrial disputes and wage reductions.

Interview Sample Profile /participants
The defined sampling frame for the interviews part of the study is based on Irish Cement employees, including a number of HR executives and a senior operations manager. It also includes a selection of employees from various different departments, varying ages and length of service. It would be impracticable to collect samples from all of the employees.

Following a discussion with the Operations Director regarding access it was recommended a better sample would be obtained by only contacting a smaller

select sample rather then contacting all employees at random. This sampling error may limit the response but decrease the number of errors or inaccurate responses. Participants were initially accessed by requesting access through the Operations Director, and then by directly requesting their participation over the telephone or in person.

In selecting the employee participants to interview the target population chosen for semi structured interviews was a sample of employees ranging in age from late forties to over the age of fifty. There was a total sample population of forty-six permanent employees, which included two managers, nine supervisors, ten apprentices, two graduate engineers, four mechanical tradesman, two electricians and the remaining general workers. Apprentices, graduate engineers, and younger employees were not included in the selection of the sample due to their age. A census sample was not taken as it would have been too time consuming and would have included eighteen temporary employees who are also under this age bracket.

Interviews were conducted in private, in the person's office or Personnel office. Managers and employees participated voluntarily and their confidence was assured. As a reward to participating each person was given a box of chocolates.

In total six interviews were conducted, three employees, two Human Resource executives and one employee from an operations role. Their positions included two HR managers, two managers, one supervisor and one temporary employee. Overall three employees were interviewed from Limerick Works location, two from Platin Works and one from Head Office. The mean age of the current employees ranged from 40 years to 60 years old. Five of the interviewees were male and one female.

Data Collection

Semi structured interviews were used to answer research objectives number one and four. This involved interviews with three employees (Group A) in the organisation and included questions regarding their view of the companies approach to work-life balance related issues it also sought their opinion towards

older workers. Semi-structured interviews were also used with two HR executives and a senior operations manager (Group B). It is intended to identify similar or different factors that contribute to the forming of WLB initiatives in the organisation and also addresses their awareness and appreciation of WLB for older workers.

The group A, employee interview schedule complied of sections relating to the companies approach to work-life balance, awareness and appreciation and older workers. All three interviews contained the same topics and questions. The interview commenced with a very brief discussion in relation to the companies approach to work-life balance, followed by their experiences of work-life balance related issues. This enabled the interviewees to share their knowledge and experience of how the company dealt with this area.

Subsequent questions focused on their opinion and appreciation of work-life balance initiatives, the benefits of a formal approach, to the employer and employee and types of initiatives that could be introduced. The second half of the questions focused on similar questions but directed at older workers and their thoughts on specific initiatives and awareness. Some questions had additional sub-questions to probe further and explore any areas of particular interest to the interviewee as they emerged.

The group B interviewee schedule for HR executives and the operations manager were structured in a similar manner. Sections referred to the type of practice in operation, the main factors contributing to the adoption of work-life balance initiatives and older workers. The interview commenced with their opinion of the work-life balance practice in operation, followed by the companies approach. Subsequent questions were directed at the benefits of the initiatives to the organisation and more in-depth questions regarding the external factors. The final four questions focused on initiatives towards older workers and possible benefits.

All the interviews were conducted face to face. They approximately lasted between 15 to 35 minutes and were conducted in the workplace. Five interviews

were recorded using a smart phone application called 'Supernote', these were then inputted in full text format and analysed. The third interview was not recorded because the employee requested it, no reasons was given therefore hand written notes were taken during the interview.

Summary of completed interviews

- Interview 1 was completed with the Purchasing Manager who has nearly 7 years in ICL. He is aged in his mid forties, married with children and has previous experience from the logistics industry. The interview was held in his office on Wednesday 31st July 2013 at 8:30am in Limerick Works. The setting was quiet with only one interruption, where the interview and recording was stopped for less than a minute. The immediate impression was that the interview discussion started in the wrong direction, but returned to the questions and format after some discussion. Following the early interruption the recording was resumed but unfortunately it was not possible to download the remaining recording and therefore lost.

- Interview 2 was completed with the Temporary Systems Controller who has 38 years experience in ICL. He is sixty and married with children. Originally starting as an Electrical Apprentice, he then continued to work on as a qualified Electrical Tradesman until 16 years ago when he took the role of Systems Controller. In 2012 he availed of a redundancy and has since returned as a temporary employee. The interview was held in the Personnel Manger's office on Wednesday 31st July 2013 at 2:00pm in Limerick Works. There were no interruptions and overall it went very well, with plenty of direct answers. Prior to the interview a copy of the questions were shared to give the interviewee an idea of the type of questions asked. They then brought the copy into the interview, which meant it was harder to probe or pursue other areas as the interviewee kept following the set list of questions.

- Interview 3 was completed with the Mechanical Supervisor who has 19 years experience in ICL. He is aged in his mid forties, married with children. Initially commencing as a Mechanical Tradesman, he was then promoted to the role of Planner and two years ago, into his current role. The interview was held in the Personnel Managers office on Wednesday 31st July 2013 at 4:00pm in Limerick Works. The interview was recorded and there were no interruptions. On listening back to the recording it was difficult to understand some words due to the accent but overall there was some good discussion and insights given from someone with long service and experience.

- Interview 4 was completed with the HR & Quarry Manager who has 13 years experience in ICL. He is aged in his mid thirties, married with a child. Previous roles held were Graduate Mechanical Engineer, Maintenance Manager up to the current role, which he has held for over two years. The interview was held in his office on Friday 2nd August 2013 at 10:30am in Platin Works. The interview was recorded and lasted 24 minutes, it was interrupted once, but the recording was not stopped. The interview went well and the interviewee provided a lot of detail in his answers with many personal opinions and examples. There was also a good discussion after the interview had finished which was not recorded.

- Interview 5 was completed with the HR Manager of Irish Cement Limited, who has over 12 years experience in ICL and had previously held the role of HR Manager in Platin Works. Aged in her late thirties, she is married with children. The interview was held in their home on Tuesday 6th August 2013 at approximately 8:30pm. The interview was recorded, lasting 33 minutes and there were no interruptions. The answers given went into sufficient depth and detail. There were also several examples given and a good insight into an area that they were also clearly interested in.

- Interview 6 was completed with the Operations Director of Irish Cement Limited, who has over 15 years service with ICL. Previous roles held include Plant Manger, Engineering Manager, and Senior Mechanical Engineer. He is aged in his early forties, married with kids. The interview was held in his office on Thursday 15th August 2013 at 3:00pm in Platin Works. The interview was recorded and lasted 20 minutes as both parties were under time constraints. There were no interruptions. The interview, while short in length, covered all questions and gave good detail in their answers. It also provided a good insight into the thoughts and opinions of a senior operations manager and to the companies approach to work-life balance.

Survey Questionnaire

In order to explore research questions 2 and 3 further probability-sampling methods were used. This was selected as the most appropriate in order to find out more about the extent of awareness and appreciation of WLB initiatives with HR Professionals and to establish the benefits of older workers. "Probability sampling or representative sampling is most commonly associated with survey-based research strategies…"(Saunders et al 2009 p214).

A survey was designed, as it is the most effective method of gathering sufficient data from a target sample of individuals, using 'the same set of questions in a predetermined order deVaus (2002 cited in Saunders et al 2007 p360)**.** It was also used because "it provides an efficient way of collecting responses from a large sample prior to quantitative analysis" taking place (Saunders et al 2007 p361).

A survey was considered the best approach for this type of research, descriptive and explanatory, carried out in this paper. The survey focused on respondent's attitude and opinions, which will enable the author to identify and describe the differences in the various phenomena uncovered. Supporting the survey will be the use of semi-structured interviews as outlined, these will compliment the methods of research design.

<u>Sample profile/Participants</u>

Participants were selected from contacts compiled through the Internet based professional networking site, 'LinkedIn'. This was chosen, as it was the easiest means of contacting and communicating with professionals. The targeted recipients were HR Professionals and specialists with knowledge of work-life balance initiatives and older workers from their respective experiences and organisations. It was estimated that 200 samples would be required to give an appropriate sample. Stutely's study (2003 cited in Saunders et al 2007)**,** provides for a useful 'rule of thumb' that a minimum sample size of 30, in each category for statistical analysis.

The initial participants list complied of over 470 connections. This was screened down to a final 186 participants, based on their role and known experience in Human Resource Management. Saunders et al (2009 p214) state that statisticians have proven that 'the larger the absolute size of a sample, the more closely its distribution will be to the normal distribution and thus the more robust it will be.'

Simple random sampling was chosen as the most appropriate technique to due to the size of the sample, which reflects a variation of organisation, age, tenure and location. Coverage error occurred as the list from which the sample was drawn does not include all elements of the HR professionals population. This according to Dillman (2007 p9) makes it impossible to give all elements of the population 'an equal or known chance of being included in the sample survey'.

A ten per cent sampling error was estimated as not all participants are currently working in HR. This may have contributed to a lower response rate as many have worked in HR before or are now specialising in consultancy and therefore don't have an organisation large enough to base the survey on. "Formally, sampling error is the result of attempting to survey only some, and not all, of the units in the survey population" (Dillman 2007, p9).

To explain the purpose of the questionnaire a cover letter was completed and attached to all surveys. 'Research by Dillman (2007) has shown that the message contained in a self-administered questionnaire's covering letter will affect the

response rate'. Some of the sample will ignore it and some will decide whether to answer the questionnaire or not based on it (Saunders et al 2009). It was also used to express appreciation in advance and seeking their advice in the area of Work-life balance as recommended by Saunders et al (2009). No pre-survey email was sent out prior to sending the cover letter and questionnaire due to time pressure.

Similar to De Cieri et al (2005) in order to 'ensure anonymity and encourage openness and honesty in responses' individual companies were not identified and the request for personal information was kept to a minimum. No request for the recipients name or address was made and any reference to the recipient's age or sex was omitted. However, this prevented matching and comparison of responses in the analysis.

An introductory note was placed at the start of the survey, to explain clearly why the author wanted the respondents to complete the survey, is essential according to Dillman (2007) in achieving as a high a response rate as possible. It was placed on the first page of the survey, in addition to the introductory email. The respondent was also thanked again for their participation and the authors contact name and email address was provided for any queries they may have.

Survey Design

The layout was designed to allow the first eleven questions focus on work-life balance and the last five focuses on older workers. 'The goal of writing a survey question for self administration is to develop a query that every potential respondent will interpret in the same way, be able to respond to accurately and be willing to answer' (Dillman 2007 p32). This advice by Dillman was used as a guide and kept in mind when designing the survey and questions.

Overall the survey focused on the work-life balance initiatives, their influence, awareness and frequency used within the respondent's organisations. The last part of the survey focused on older workers, their opinion of them and whether their organisation has any initiatives directed specifically towards them.

A total of sixteen questions were asked in the survey. The survey commenced with two quantity questions where the responses related to the number of people employed in their organisation and the approximate percentage of their workforce that are older workers. There were three category questions used throughout the survey, which asked the respondent to choose from categories of amount and frequency. Two 'yes/no' questions were asked referring to whether work-life balance initiatives assist the organisation in achieving its competitive advantage and whether it had any work-life balance for older workers. Respondents were asked to identify the work-life balance initiatives available to employees in their organisation using two list questions, the first in a general sense and the second referred to initiatives availed of by older workers. A list question was also used to identify who administered the work-life balance initiatives and in identifying the benefits and disadvantages of older workers. One rating question was used, which asked respondents to rate the benefits of work-life balance initiatives in order of importance. The final question was an open question to allow the respondent leave any additional comments. No questions used 'if' and 'when' to start the question as it allows some respondents the option not to answer (Dillman 2007).

The construction of the questionnaire was designed in order to allow the respondent to flow through and answer questions quickly. The first three questions were designed to make the respondents ease into the survey, asking for approximate answers and what sector their organisation was in. It was decided to ask the respondents whether their organisations had a formal or informal work-life balance practice at question 10, rather then asking them earlier to as it may have led to a negative response and unbiased answers. The most interesting questions were placed in the middle, with the rating question placed sixth, followed by three category questions.

In order to close the questionnaire appropriately, Saunders et al (2009) identify it is important to clearly explain what the respondent is to do with the completed questionnaire. In order to close the survey, recipients were requested to click 'Done' when they had completed it.

Data Collection

The type of survey used was an, 'internet survey', which was completed by the respondents online and self-administered using a website called 'Survey Monkey'.

A pre-survey contact email was left out due to time constraints. The final survey was sent out via email, which included a link to 'Survey Monkey' on Wednesday 17th July 2013 to 190 recipients. A reminder email was sent on Thursday 25th July, which thanked recipients who had already responded and gave an option to those still wishing to respond to do so by Wednesday 31st July 2013. The survey was closed on Friday 2nd August 2013.

Rewards for replies were not included but appreciation was noted on the cover letter and again at the beginning of the survey. Instead, it was noted in the cover letter that the author was seeking their advice, this has been recognised by and as a way of providing a kind of reward. (Dillman 2007)

A pilot test was conducted in order to 'refine the questionnaire so that the respondents will have no problems in answering the questions and there will be no problem in recording the data', (Saunders et al 2009, p394). Fink (2003b) suggests that 'the minimum number for a pilot test should be 10'. The pilot surveys included five HR Professionals and five family members, to encourage honest and reliable responses. This also tested the questionnaires 'face validity: that is whether the questionnaire makes sense' (Saunders et al 2009). The pilot test of the self-administered questionnaire also assisted the author in finding out the reliability and suitability of the questions, problems and additional information as highlighted by (Bell 2005). Feedback from the pilot surveys was that it took approximately six minutes to complete. The questions were clear, easily understood and associated as being directed at HR Professionals.

Issues – changes

There were a couple of issues highlighted before the survey was finalised. It was advised that additional assurance should be highlighted in the introductory letter that the recipient's personal information would not be shared. It was also

highlighted that giving the interviewee information regarding WLB in advance of the interview may influence their response, rather then seek their opinion and perspective. The description of older workers was also reduced to just one line to avoid prejudicing recipient's responses in by outlining the importance of them. Several questions were separated as they were asking two questions in one. Also some questions were leading in that they were leading to the preference of answer. Lastly, one question was changed in order to limit the response to the preferred area.

There were also several issues highlighted after the survey had been released. A 'measurement error' according to Dillman (2007 p9), realised after the survey was released accounts for poor question wording in questions and poor presentation of questions, which lead to answers being inaccurate and that are not understood. Mr. Pfaff made the following suggestions, which were not changed in the survey.

Overall presentation, it was suggested to only list a few questions per page, as this would allow participants to get an overview of questions before answering them. The use of a bar to indicate their progress was also recommended.

It was also recommended to adjust the answer options, in reference to Question 1 and 2. Using question 1 for example, what if a recipient works in a company with 100 employees. Would they choose category 1 or 2?

In relation to Question 4 and various others, it was highlighted that there was no option for the recipient to reply that they their organisation does not have any.

On Question 7 it was recommended that the categories should start with "very low" and end with "very high", since it's more natural to start with the lowest and end with the highest possibility.

On Question 15, there is no question logic, for example if the respondent answered "no" to question 14, they should not be able to answer question 15. If question logic was applied then all the respondents that chose "no" in question 14

should not be asked question 15. An alternative solution was to add the following comment "Skip question 15 if your answer is no".

Access and Ethical Considerations

Participation of all participants of both the interviews and the survey was voluntary. All responses and recordings are kept private and confidential for the purpose of this study only and not distributed to any third party. Confidentiality was guaranteed.

Chapter 4   Research Findings

Interview findings

A qualitative approach was taken to the interview findings due to the variety and nature of the information and its wide range of meanings. Therefore, once the interviews were transcribed, they were read and together with interview notes, summarised carefully. Following this, categories were derived which were linked to the objectives as outlined in the Research Methodology chapter. Sub-categories were outlined using the Strauss and Corbin (2008) method. Names of the categories were derived from a combination of terms that emerged from the data, terms used by interviewees and from terms used in the literature review, notably the work of Grady et al (2008).

Categories and Sub categories

Under research objectives 1 and 4, which used semi-structured interviews, the initial categories were derived from terms identified in the literature and used by the interviewees. Following this units from each transcript were attached to the appropriate sub category. Codes were designed and used to summarise and facilitate easier understanding of each category. The codes will also be used later in the analysis to identify any themes and interrelationships.

Category 1
Extent and relative influence of external, internal and individual factors on the adoption of work-life balance initiatives.

Category 2
Extent of awareness and appreciation of Work-life balance initiatives for older workers.

Category 1 – Findings
The following themes emerged from the interview findings that related to category 1: Pressure, culture and commitment, communication, relationships and awareness. These are outlined further in sub-categories below.

<u>Pressure</u>

The effects of the recent downturn in the building industry along with the economic turmoil in the banks and cessation in government expenditure were evident in the background when one manager explained the some of the reasons that lead to recent restructuring referred to in his response regarding pressure.

"So, for me the external…pressures really were the impetus to get us to go and implement various changes which in some respect needed to be done anyway." 3B

Cost was also identified as peripheral finding linked to external pressures, as one HR manager highlighted how they dealt with its pressure.

"I'll put it to you this way. We have had to fight to keep these flexibilities. Because obviously they cost us money." 2B

When the Operations Manager was probed and asked whether the external changes had any influence on productivity, his response was interesting as he linked it back to being a positive for employees;

"I think this restructuring, what it has done is that it has arguably even improved it because you know when the guys are here, they're not here longer, ok. I just think that they're being challenged more and they are also having to be more productive when they're actually here on site as opposed to being here longer and I would like to think that you know guys get more reward from their work because it's more challenging and its more variable and so on for them." 3B

<u>Culture and Commitment</u>

Both HR executives and the operations manger referred to culture and commitment in their responses when asked what they thought was the main factors that contributed to the introduction of WLB initiatives and flexibilities.

"I think it was the culture of the place…it's 75 years now this year…I think that it started off very local, you'd get a family, then, all the uncles would be employed, then all the grandchildren would be employed, so there was quite a family orientated approach, we were heavily unionised but we had pretty good relations with the unions and it always was the tradition that you would look out for people" 2B

"…I think we have a tremendous loyalty and a tremendous commitment from the employees, so what generates that? …I would say myself a lot of it is the culture…reasonable flexibility with holidays, partly the sick pay scheme, partly the health checks…I think that culture is key in terms of getting the commitment and getting the support that we get from the employees." 3B

A HR manager also identified culture and commitment as the company is know for looking after employee's when they need it most.

"So I think we've proven down through the years that we can manage that situation because we continue to have people who both are very committed to Irish Cement and respond and prove that by responding at times" 1B

Communication

Communication was another re-occurring theme that emerged as an important element in the operational side of how flexibilities and initiatives functioned within the organisation.

One HR manger highlighted that it was down to the communication between the employee's and their manager or supervisor.

"…I'd be pretty confident that that happens, that people say "listen" you know "I have a certain commitment outside of work at the moment and I just need to manage it"…once they're forthcoming with the information, the whole thing is communication." 1B

He continued, emphasising that other managers were also aware of the importance of communication.

"We do certainly make sure…the Managers are aware of the fact that they need to keep open the lines of communications. Give them an opportunity to raise concerns." 1B

Relationships

Relationships were one of the most re-occurring themes that emerged from all interviews. It was identified as an important element in the functionality of work-life balance initiatives.

One HR manger outlined in detail why he thought WLB initiatives worked:

"…very much supported by…developing good working relationships between the Engineers, Supervisors and Managers…and that they're all working together and assisting each other to make sure that they're allowing themselves to get the right balance between their outside life and the demands of the workplace." 1B

His responses also highlight that relationships between the employees and their manager or supervisor are important in resolving any WLB related issues.

"…the person they are immediately reporting to, they would have…quite a close working relationship with them…And try and make sure that they deal with any situation within that context" 1B

Relationships could also be seen in a positive or negative sense in this response, where the same manager was asked whether a formal or informal practice would be better.

"It would be an informal practice we would have here in terms of the work/life balance…a case-by-case basis typically. I mean you wouldn't necessarily have…a one fits all solution for everybody or it probably is

depending as well, on the relationship between people within departments as well...So yeah it would be informal in nature." 1B

Relationships were also identified in an employee's response to the same question whether a formal or informal practice would be better.

"Yes, for some people, some might not get on with a Supervisor, so a formal practice could be better so the employee knows they are available. There could be longer term issues, wife sick etc. No harm in a formal approach." 2A

The same employee was asked whether he personally had ever any issues in WLB related matters, his response indicates that this was possibly due to a healthy relationship with their supervisor.

"No – never, had a good boss – as in my immediate boss, my Supervisor, I never went to a manager, I never had to. Work with them (Supervisors)" 2A

Category 2 – Findings

The findings in this category were divided into two areas, 'general awareness and appreciation of WLB initiatives' and 'awareness and appreciation of WLB initiatives for older workers'. The employee's general awareness and appreciation to work-life balance initiatives in general can be summarised in the following units of data.

General awareness and appreciation
When asked about the companies approach and to work-life balance in the organisation and whether they ever experienced any issues there was a varied response.

"I think they're very fair…I have never gone and asked for the time off or whatever for personal reasons and not gotten the time". 3A

While this employee's response highlighted that they had never heard of the term 'work-life balance', their opinion of how the company handled issues related to the practice showed they were aware and appreciative of the companies approach.

"First time I have heard of the term. Personally, I never had any problems in getting off. The companies approach has been excellent – from a personal point of view…and other employees would agree too. If someone had problems at home, never a problem, never an issue" 2A

Another employee opinion was not as appreciative and identified that the companies approach was more focused on production rather then its employees.

"50:50. Its really, get the product out first, and worry about the person afterwards." 1A

When the employees were asked if they thought other employees appreciated and availed of work-life balance initiatives offered by the company, the responses

indicated that the culture was that while they availed of them, they were also abused in the past. This may be the reason the why there was never a formal practice.

This employee's response highlighted that they appreciated the flexibility offered by the company and that they did not abuse it.

"Definitely. Not avail, but taken when necessary." 2A

Another employee's response showed more thought and gave more detail into the mindset of other employee's views of the flexibilities and initiatives offered by the company.

"Appreciate? I think they avail of it definitely. Avail of it definitely. Appreciate?…some people take it for granted, they look at it like it's their entitlements…, if you want to look at it that way." 3A

When this comment was probed further, he was asked whether a formal or informal practice would be better for the company, their response outlined that culture had most likely been the reason no formal WLB practice had been introduced.

"Any good initiative that was ever within the company was always abused and ended up…being taken away, do you know what I mean? … People abusing it." 3A

When an employee was asked, whether they thought the company were aware of the need to have a WLB practice, their response indicates their awareness and also their appreciation of the companies efforts over the years.

"I don't think they are aware, no. Yet they are doing it, but I don't think they are aware. The company have looked after a lot of people over the years." 2A

This response also demonstrates their belief that the company were not aware of the need to have WLB a practice. Later in the interview asked whether they had approached the company and suggested initiatives, they responded, indicating their preference to have a formal WLB practice.

"No, never had to...A formal option would make people more aware." 2A

HR executives and Operations Manager
Findings relating to awareness amongst the HR and Operations managers touched on various different elements. When asked about the companies approach to work-life balance initiatives, the following responses were recorded:

"I would say we handle them pretty well; this is in my own view. I could probably understand how it might be construed that it might be a more reactive rather than proactive approach…1B

The same manger continued, indicating their understanding in having a formal approach.

"…maybe some more awareness and maybe a little bit more information that might be given out through the workplace. I could understand how that…may help the situation…yeah I could see the merits in it." 1B

One HR executive remarked that it is both, the responsibility of the individual and the company to be aware of their work-life balance.

"Because ultimately the work-life balance really is the responsibility of the individual. But of course the company…has to be watching out that you're not overworking anybody." 2B

Awareness and appreciation for older workers
In response to a question regarding WLB benefits for older workers, the interviewees suggested some WLB initiatives for older workers during the

interview, this showed that they were aware of the benefits and had thought of possible initiatives. A phased retirement or reductions in working hours was suggested:

"it would really help them adjust because…it's a big step going from working five days a week to nothing, you know, and a big step for any, any adjustment coming close to that has got to be of benefit." 3A

Cessation of shift work was also suggested in conjunction with a reduction in working hours, or 'phasing out'.

"Definitely agree, to come off shift around 55/60 (years old), shouldn't be doing it after that. Also, reduced hours, a gradual reduction in working hours, from five days to four etc." 2A

In the discussion that followed, the interviewee was asked whether a formal WLB practice would be better, the response also included a reason why.

"As you get older, yeah. At least you know that…they give you a bit of assurance." 3A

Awareness of company initiatives

The final question for employees asked them whether they thought the company was aware of the need to have WLB initiatives for older workers. Their responses showed a lack of awareness even if the company had initiatives in place.

"…I would have thought so yeah…would have thought that over the last few years we'd have, with all the redundancies and that…I am presuming you do?" and continued "…the company must have a clue of what people are thinking about around that age." 3A

A manager's response also showed a lack of awareness of whether the company had any WLB initiatives for older workers.

"...I would say we wouldn't have any deliberate policy…to cater for a guy who's getting, maybe on a little bit in years." 3B

Yet, when asked whether the company would consider introducing WLB initiatives for older workers in the future he responded.

"Possibly, I suppose. Again, what I would say is that from my point of view, the guys that have gone out on the early retirement scheme have taken a huge amount of knowledge with them..." 3B

In response to whether they had ever received any requests to introduce WLB initiatives for older workers.

"Not particularly, no. You might have had one or two I suppose on health grounds…but not because of their age and you could even add some young people that wanted to change their job because of their health situation or whatever, or maybe their own personal family situation, but not on the basis of age I am not aware of anybody who has come and approached us on that basis." 3B

<u>Survey Findings</u>

The survey was sent out using an online Internet survey company 'Survey Monkey' on Wednesday 17th July 2013 to 190 recipients. By Wednesday 25th July 2013, by then 66 responses had been received – this accounted for 34% response rate, which was a positive start. As recommended by Saunders et al (2009) a reminder was sent one week later on, Thursday 25th July 2013. The reminder thanked those who had responded and requested those who still wanted to participate to kindly do so before, Wednesday 31st July 2013 when the survey would then be closed. Before issuing the reminder five incorrect or duplicate email addresses were removed lowering the total number of recipients from 190 to 185. The survey was closed on 2nd August 2013. In total, 91 surveys were completed and returned from the final 185 surveys sent; this represents a 49.1% response rate.

A pre-survey contact email was left out due to time constraints and the possibility of recipients omitting themselves. An option for recipients who wanted to be omitted from the survey was included at the bottom of the introductory email. Two recipients chose to be omitted. Also, after sending out the original survey, the author noticed that a date for completion was omitted in error. This was corrected in the reminder email.

The survey was titled '*Work-life balance initiatives and awareness amongst HR Professionals*' its aim was to identify the views and opinions of HR professionals towards WLB initiatives and older workers in response to the second and third research objectives.

The second research objective is:
To assess the extent of awareness and appreciation of work-life balance initiatives amongst HR professionals

The following questions were asked to explore the area of 'appreciation' further:
5. Do you think the various WLB initiatives assist the organisation in achieving its strategy and competitive advantage?

6. Rate the following benefits of WLB initiatives in order of importance to your organisation?

The following questions were asked to explore the area of 'awareness' further:

7. What level of awareness do managers and employees have of WLB initiatives?
8. Are WLB initiatives promoted within your organisation?
9. How often do employees avail of the WLB initiatives?
10. Does your organisation operate a formal of informal WLB practice for its employees?

Prior to looking at the findings from these questions it is important to present the findings from remaining questions in the survey. Three of the first four questions asked were designed to give an outline of the sample of recipients in terms of the size of their organisations, which sector it's in and the types of WLB initiatives in their organisations.

Question 1 asked how many people were employed in the respondent's organisation. The top three categories of respondents came from the following organisations: 37% from organisations with '1 to 100' employees, 18% from organisations with '100 to 300' employees and interestingly on the other end of the scale, 17% came from organisations with '2000+' employees. This response demonstrated the broad range and size of organisations included in the survey.

Questions 3 asked recipients to identify which sector, public or private, was their organisation in. The results showed that respondents were clearly represented by the private sector (85%).

Question 4 requested respondents to mark which of the pre-selected WLB initiatives were in their organisation. A similar list was originally identified by Worsley (1996) and changed for the purpose of this exercise. The most common WLB initiatives identified were, in order:

1. Part-time working – 68.5%
2. Flexi-time – 53.9%
3. Time off for family engagements/events – 51.7%
4. Working from home – 50.6%
5. Education fee support – 49.4%
6. Employee assistance programme – 48.3%
7. Weekend and evening working – 38.2%
8. Short-term contracts – 36%
9. Career breaks – 27%
10. Job-sharing – 22.5%
11. Term-time contracts – 16.9%
12. Other – 9% see comments below
13. Childcare facilities – 4.5%

Comments;

- *This depends on the role. Academics have flexibility vs admin staff home working etc may not be an option.*
- *None of the above*
- *Gym and swimming pool facilities*
- *Part sponsored education and time off for study/exams*
- *Wellness workshops quarterly*
- *Self-employment*
- *Summer hours - from May to Sept inclusive, once weekly hours are completed then every employee can leave from 12noon on Friday*
- *Promotion of health & wellbeing, 1 extra day's leave to do something important*

Appreciation of WLB initiatives, which is the other part of the second research question, was addressed in two questions.

Question 5 asked respondents whether they thought the various WLB initiatives assisted their organisation in achieving its strategy and competitive advantage. Nearly ninety percent, (89.9%) replied in the positive that they did. 10% thought that they did not and only two respondents skipped the question. Table 1 outlines the response in a pie chart.

Table 1 – WLB initiatives assist in achieving strategy & competitive advantage
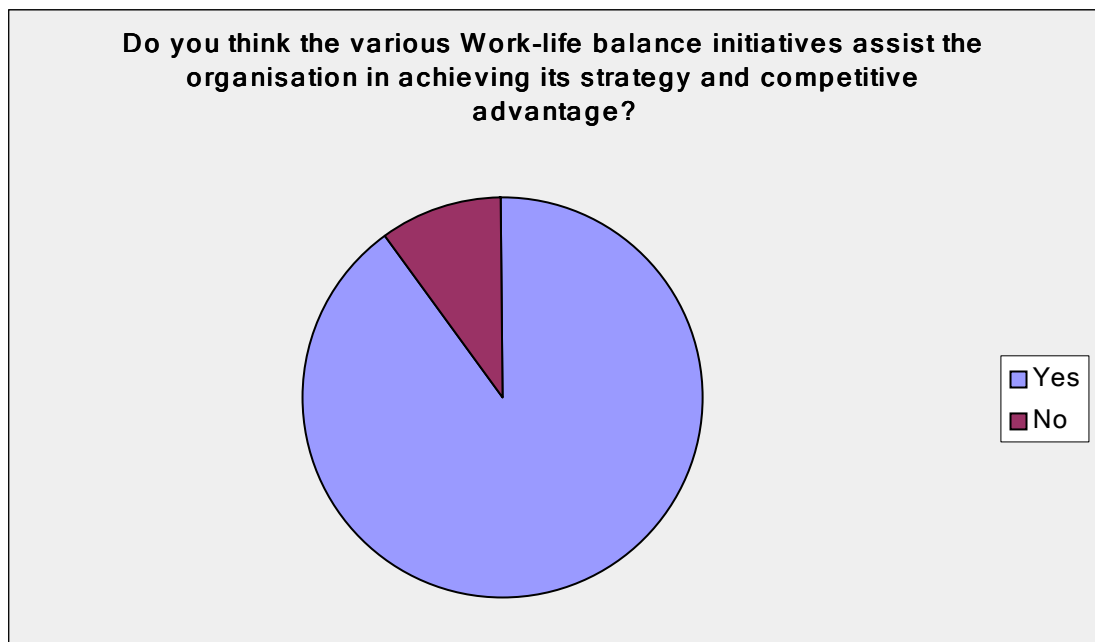
The second question relating to appreciation asked respondents to rate the benefits of WLB initiatives. The results are listed below in order of importance:

1. Retention of employees – 43.8%
2. Increased productivity – 28.4%
3. Increase commitment and motivation – 28.1%
4. Greater co-operation and flexibility – 25.8%
5. Lower absenteeism – 23.6%
6. Attracting staff – 19.5%

To directly explore the extent of awareness, respondents were asked several questions, starting with number 7; '*What level of awareness do managers and employees have of WLB initiatives?*' The highest response, (37%) indicated that the level of awareness was 'Satisfactory'; just below it was a 'High' level of awareness (30%). Table 2 shows the total percentage of respondents.

Table 2 – level of awareness of WLB initiatives
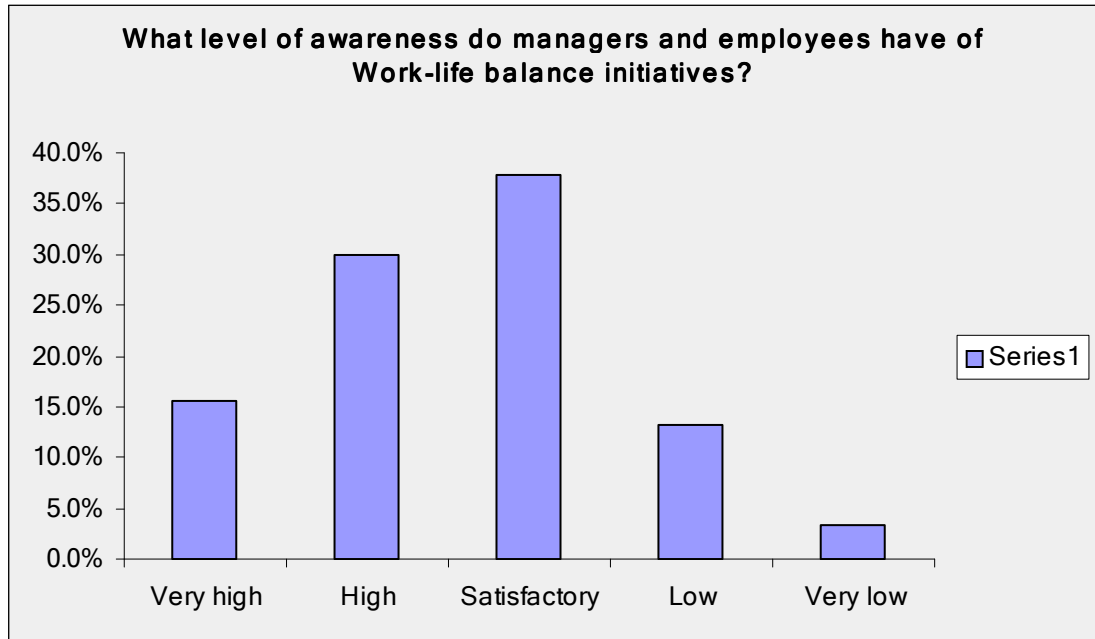
Following this, respondents were asked to rate what level of frequency WLB initiatives were promoted with their organisation. 49% replied 'sometimes', similar responses were recorded at either side of this, with 22% saying 'frequently' and 20% indicating it was 'rarely' promoted. Interestingly, an equal 8% of HR professional's respondent that their organisations had 'never' promoted WLB initiatives, the same percentage was recorded as promoting them 'all the time'.

Table 3 – shows how often WLB initiatives are promoted within organisations
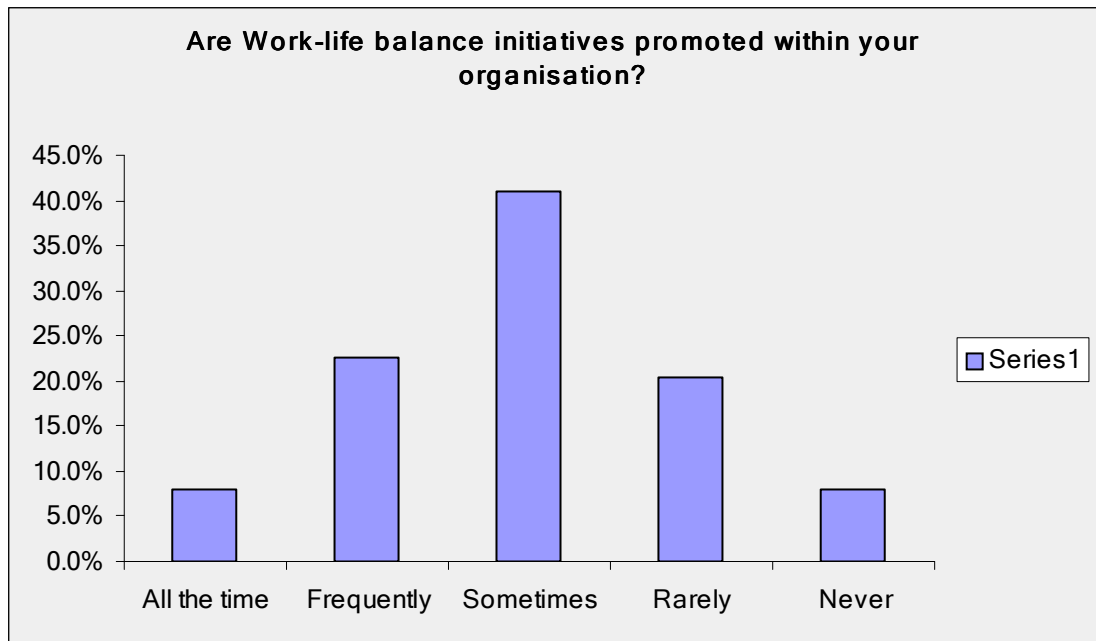
In terms of employee's awareness, the opinion of the HR professionals was sought in responding to question 9. It asked how often do employees avail of the WLB initiatives? Only 2% responded 'Never', but 28% responded 'frequently' and 37% said 'sometimes'.

Table 4 – shows how often employees avail if WLB initiatives.

How often do employees avail of the Work-life balance initiatives?
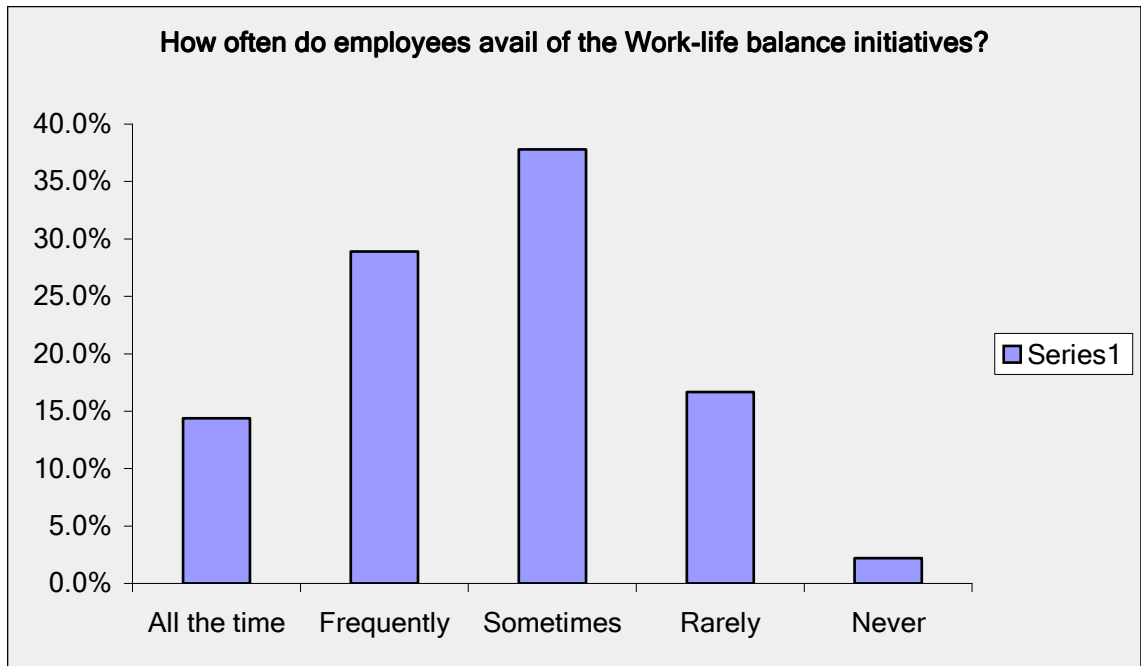
The final question relating to awareness was a general question that asked HR professionals whether they were aware of the type, formal or informal, of WLB practice its organisation operates. The highest response was for 'informal' practices at 74%. Formal practices were identified as 25% of the respondents.

Table 5 – Formal or informal WLB practice

Does your organisation operate a formal or informal Work-life balance practice for its employees?
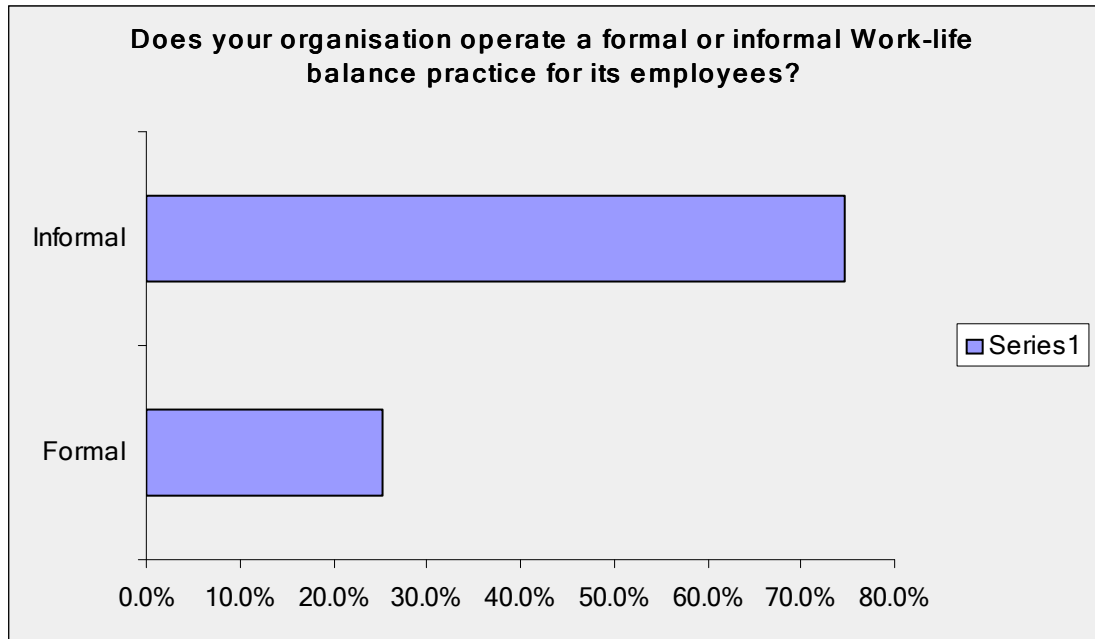
The third research objective is:

To establish the benefits and barriers to older workers and identify the types of work-life balance availed of by them.

The following questions were asked to explore this further:

2. Approximately what percentage of your workforce are older workers?

12. In your opinion, what are the main benefits of retaining or employing older workers?

13. What disadvantages would you associate with employing or retaining older workers?

14. Does your organisation have WLB initiatives particularly for older workers?

15. Which of the following WLB initiatives are primarily availed of by older workers?

Respondents were asked in Question 2 to answer the approximate percentage of their workforce that are older workers (aged 55-64 years). Just under 5% skipped the question, but the highest number (35.6%) of respondents stated that '0-10%' of their workforce were older workers. Following this, 26.4% said that '10-20%' were in this bracket. The third highest result (18.4%) were in the highest bracket of '20-50%'.   Table 6 – approximate % of older workers
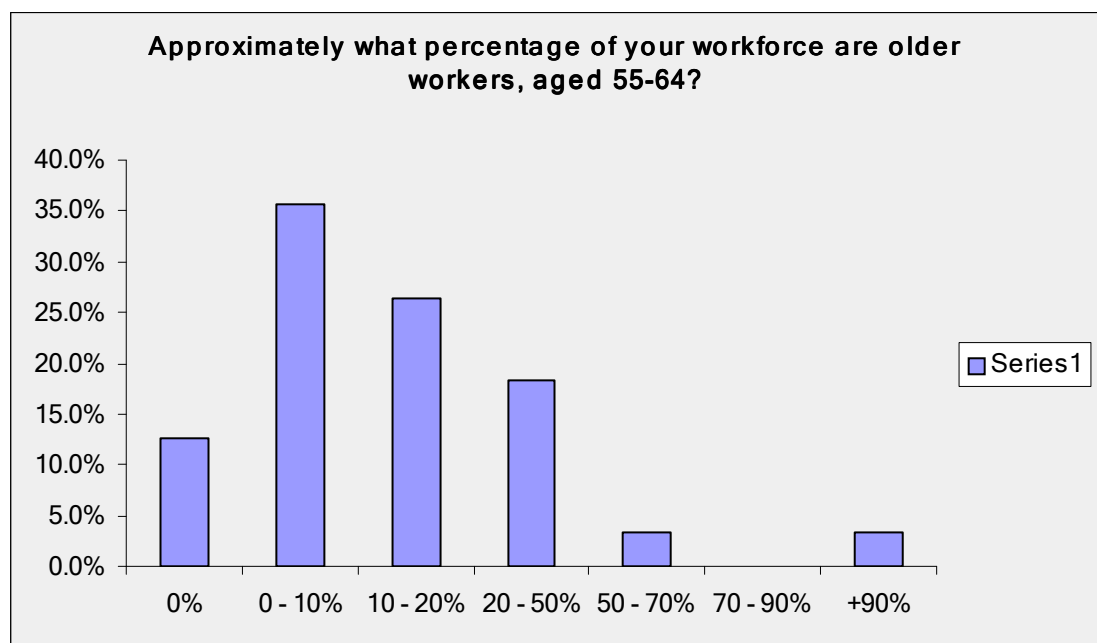
Question 12 directly asked the respondents to choose from six listed benefits of retaining or employing older workers. The question was answered by 90 of 91 recipients and three choose to leave comments. Overall, two benefits were clearly the most popular; they were 'experience' with 85.6% and 'value and knowledge' with 84.4%.

Table 7 – main benefits of retaining or employing older workers
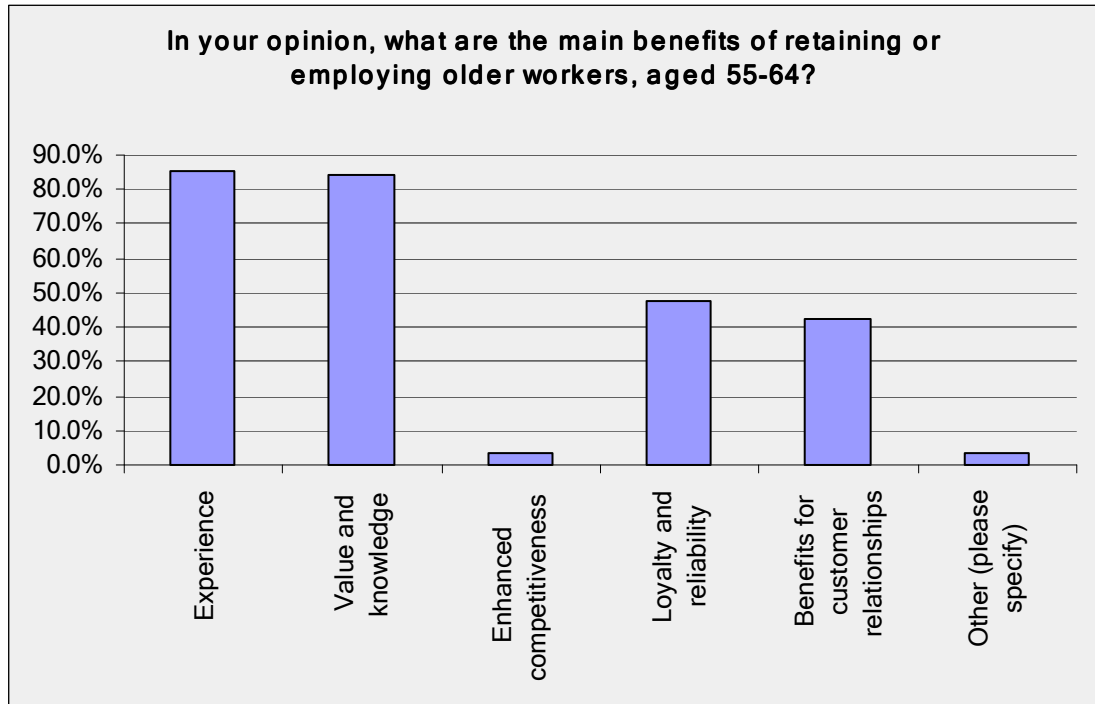
Comments:

- *Balance of ages/demographics*
- *No difference; if they're the right person for the job then the age is not an issue to consider*
- *Our line of work has interaction with difficult circumstances and older workers generally are more "level headed"*

Question 13 explored the disadvantages associated with employing or retaining older workers. Seven associated disadvantages were listed and respondents could select as many as they liked. The top three disadvantages of older workers recorded were:

1. Outdated skills – 55.3%
2. Lack of flexibility and adaptability – 40%
3. Health issues – 29.4%

Table 8 – disadvantages associated with employing or retaining older workers

What disadvantages would you associate with employing or retaining older workers?
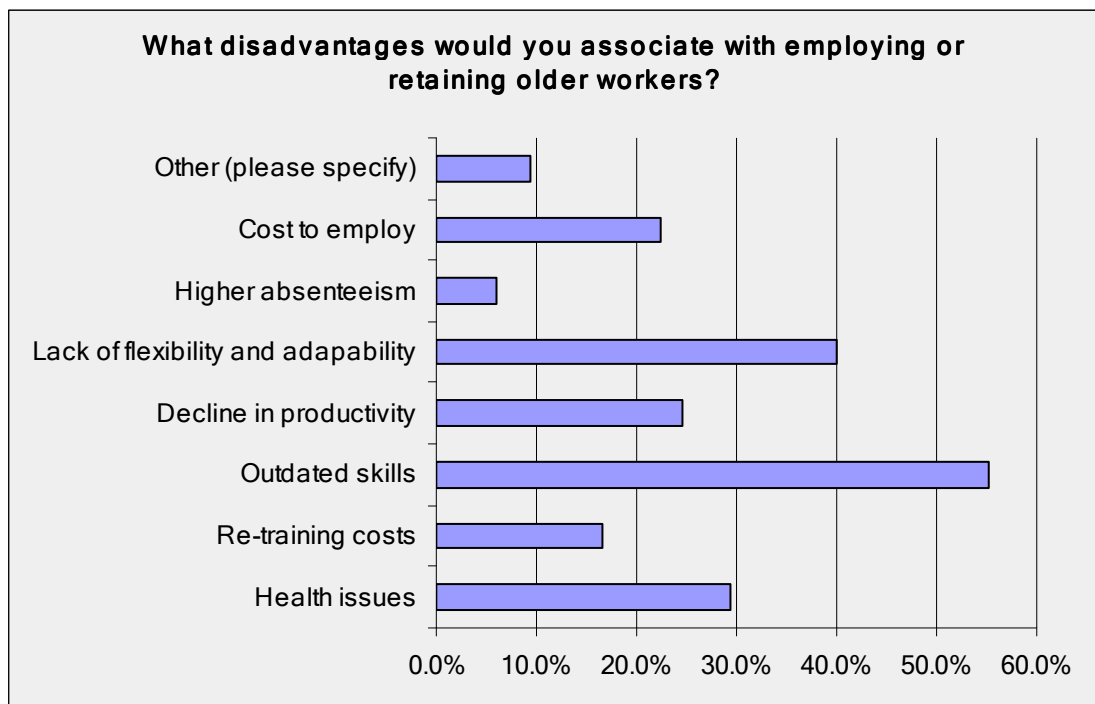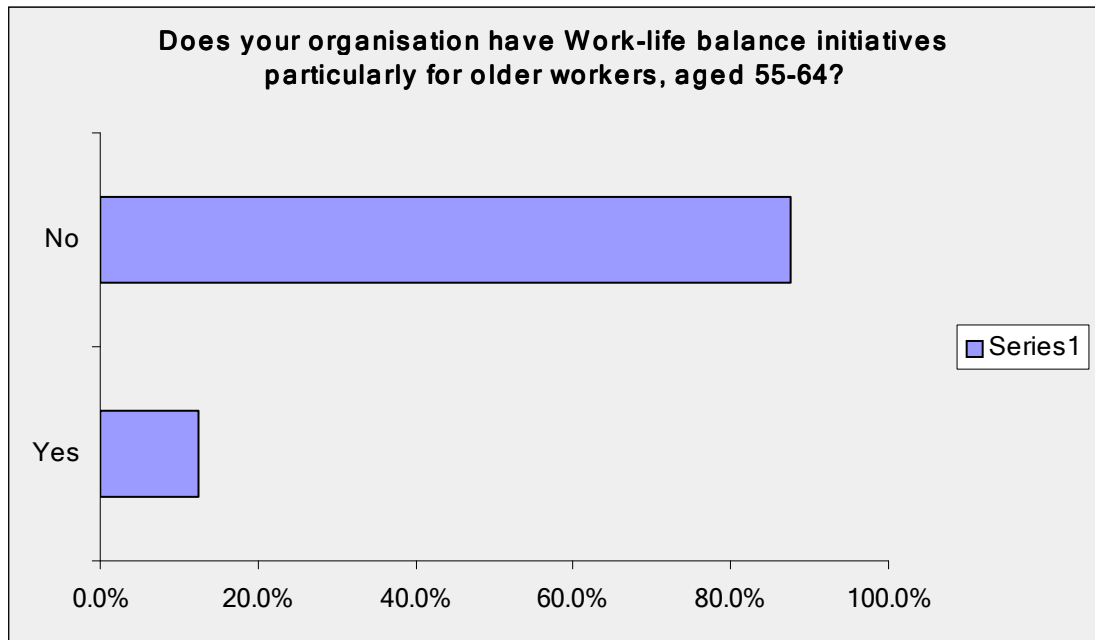
Comments:

- *I do see a disadvantage in retaining an older worker*
- *Flexibility depends on the individual, no retraining costs if development is ongoing and attached to performance mgmt.*
- *The list above could also be associated with younger employees*
- *Again, once they are the right person for the job.*
- *None*
- *Harder to perform physical demanding jobs*
- *pension issue?*
- *Very dependent on the person. Think health is irrelevant (social healthcare available here), absenteeism also and decline in productivity (role dependent if highly manual)*

Respondents were asked in question 14 whether their organisation had WLB initiatives particularly for older workers. The majority of respondents said 'no' (87%) and only 12% replied that their organisation had them.

Table 9 - percentage of organisations with WLB initiatives for older workers

Question 15 was similar to question 4; it asked the HR professionals to select which of the WLB initiatives were 'availed' of by their older workers. The question was skipped by 16 but answered by 75 respondents.

The results and comments are outlined below:
1. Part-time working – 53.3%
2. Flexi-time – 40%
3. Time off for family engagements/events – 33.3%
4. Working from home – 30.7%
5. Weekend and evening working – 17.3%
6. Employee assistance programme – 17.3%
7. Job-sharing – 14.7%
8. Career breaks – 10.7%
9. Short-term contracts – 10.7%
10. Other – 9% see comments below
11. Education fee support – 6.7%

12. Term-time contracts – 4%

13. Childcare facilities – 2.7%

Comments:
- *Not applicable - none in this category*
- *Depends on the role. Some roles can't offer flexibility at certain times e.g. academics during term time, payroll at end of month etc.*
- *Not sure*
- *Don't know*
- *We only have one at the moment and that is a female under 40 who has returned after 1 year maternity leave and now working 3 days a week.*
- *Nothing in particular that other employees would not avail of*
- *I don't know*

The last question was open-ended asking respondents to leave any comments and thanked them for their time. Altogether eleven comments were left, a selection are listed below.

Comments:
- *Unless there is a culture of flexibility in an organisation, many of the examples listed will never be available to employees, despite possible benefits to the organisation/people.*
- *Problem here is that any of the work-life balances that company has seem to be more to do with the need of a person and the desire of the company to retain that individual. Biggest work/life balances item that I'm aware all will get is time off if something comes up (eg kid starting school, dentist appointment, collect kids on a particular day etc) but these are all short items.*
- *This survey highlights the range of work life balance initiatives that may be employed in the workplace. It would be useful to know what trends and insights come out of this study. In particular, to what extent does cost have a bearing on decisions to introduce such initiatives, and how is this balanced by the benefits that accrue from their introduction.*

- *We are a small workforce of 5 employees so there are no formal arrangements arranged. I believe that if our workforce was to grow then there would be a need to formalise the policies.*

- *I believe that my company could do more for older employees. The same work life balance initiatives apply to all type of employees, no matter what age they have.*

- *Formal work-life balance initiatives are coming on-stream in our company following a staff survey. The company demographic is very young so it's unlikely that initiatives would be specifically designed for the older workers (AKA board members).*

- *It is very important for our Company to retain older workers as there is a shortage of educated younger inspectors (workers)*

- *As I am self-employed, the answers may skew your overall findings but I am a complete advocate of Work/Life Balance initiatives and of the value of older workers and promote this in my work in organisations.*

Chapter 5   Analysis and Discussion

As highlighted in the introduction, people are living longer now then ever before; the OECD (2013), recently reported that people aged 30 years now could live to be 150 years old. These developments, while positive, are most likely due to people getting healthier. Other developments include, advances in medicine and technology, which will ultimately result in people having to work longer, along with implications on their pensions and an extension to retirement ages, as seen already in the UK.

The primary aim of this research is to gain a better understanding of the factors that contribute to the adoption of work-life balance initiatives and their perceived benefits to older workers. Older workers were defined as workers aged 55-64 years.

This was an inductive study, because after reviewing the literature and understanding the theory this paper aims to understand the various factors behind the theory and at the same time, try an identify any other factors that should be considered.

The following research objectives were outlined in order to try and explore the topic further.

1. To investigate the extent and relative influence of external, internal and individual factors on the adoption of Work-life balance initiatives in an Irish manufacturing organisation.

2. To assess the extent of awareness and appreciation of WLB initiatives amongst HR professionals.

3. To establish the benefits and barriers to older workers and identify the types of WLB initiatives availed of by them.

4. To assess the extent of awareness and appreciation of WLB initiatives amongst older workers in Irish manufacturing organisations.

The research instrument chosen to answer objectives 1 and 4 were through semi-structured interviews. The sample population was a combination of employee's from an Irish manufacturing organisation.

Discourse analysis was used and is identified through the use of quotations in the text as outlined in the findings chapter, also through the use of themes identified in the interviewee's responses. Detailed excerpts from the interview transcripts, which link to each theme, support them and relate back to the research objectives. All interviews were analysed in detail and comments were placed into sections corresponding to themes and also giving an overall view of the participant's opinion and values.

The interview schedule was completed as follows, a more detailed layout can be found in the appendices:

Group A – Employee's interviews
1: Purchasing Manager - Wednesday 31st July 2013 at 9.30am
2: Systems Controller - Wednesday 31st July 2013 at 2.00pm
3: Mechanical Supervisor - Wednesday 31st July 2013 at 4.00pm

Group B – HR executives and Operations Manager
4: HR & Quarry Manager - Friday 2nd August 2013 at 10:30am
5: HR Manager - Tuesday 6th August 2013 at 8:30pm
6: Operations Manager - Thursday 15th August 2013 at 3:00pm

As outlined in the research methodology, separate questions were allocated for each interview group. Questions were designed to focus on exerting information in relation to the research objectives (1 and 4).

The first four questions asked the participants about their view and opinion, to the companies approach to WLB related issues and initiatives within the

organisation and their awareness and appreciation of these initiatives. The later set of questions were structured around older workers and the perceived benefits of WLB initiatives and their awareness of them within the organisation.

Analysis of the findings was completed in line with the research objectives. The first and fourth research objective's findings were drawn from the semi-structured interviews with employees, HR executives and an operations manager. The second and third were drawn from a survey conducted with HR professionals within the HR sector. The survey focused on assessing their awareness and appreciation of WLB initiatives, the benefits and barriers to older workers and the types of initiatives availed of by them.

Analysis of research objective number 1:

Considerable similarities were found in certain areas amongst both groups of employees and HR/Operation managers. In some cases the responses from the employees were echoed by the managers in respect to the informal nature of WLB initiatives and emphasis on the 'relationship' between the employee and supervisor or manager. A similar understanding was also identified in that both parties were aware and appreciative of the informal WLB initiatives and that while a formal policy might be better, the culture and history of abuse has ruled this option out.

In terms of external factors, the findings suggest a link to the 'changing structure of work' as identified by Grady et al (2008) because the company is a traditional manufacturing company, which has seen the number of jobs fall dramatically over the past 4-5 years. In its Limerick plant alone the number employed fell from 165 in 2009 to 48 in 2012. This followed restructurings in both of its locations, which was as a result of a rapid decline in sales, coupled with changes in the economy and market.

A second external factor identified was the link to 'cost', in particular to the cost of running the initiatives to the organisation and the fact that none of the initiatives had been cut or restricted since the restructuring, which was referred to by one HR Manager. This may also be associated with the external developments

in employee rights or social expectations. It could also be seen as reversal to what Maxwell and McDougall (2004) refer to as macro – 'economic and political' forces, which goes back to the eighties, where the main employment strategies were reducing labour costs and permanent employees, along with the need to identify new patterns of working to limit labour costs.

Another external link mentioned by a HR manager was the organisations link to the 'community'; similarly Guest (2002) refers to 'stakeholders', namely, the individual, the family, the employer, the community and the state. Guest points out that that most of the research is based on the individual workers and their circumstances. But as the concept of work-life balance implies, it is part of a wider social circle and that these stakeholders must also be responsible. There is also evidence from Conway and Monks (2008) that further research would benefit from insights into the multiple stakeholders being involved, i.e. the organisation, its employees and the local community.

Interview findings showed that the 'culture' had been created over many years and through links with the community the organisation had been viewed as a great place to work and that it had 'done a lot for people over the years'. This stakeholder link in work-life balance could also be incorporated as an additional 'wing' into the growing popularity of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) within organisations.

Findings that could be categorised as internal factors were more plentiful. This may have been as a result of the relationship between the interviewee and interviewer, as they were more forthcoming with information. One of the salient findings was the discovery of several themes, which could be linked to the 'human resource management' (Grady et al 2008) or 'operationalisation' elements of work-life balance, an area identified by Guest (2002) that is not given enough consideration. The main themes evident from the findings were 'culture/commitment', 'relationships' and 'communication'. Not many links to the literature were established but each theme has been explored extensively under social sciences and definitely worth further research.

The theme of 'culture', with the company's history and relationship with the local community, is internally linked to the 'commitment' and is referred to by one HR manager in terms of the need to have employees who are committed to their role. He states that certain roles have a lot of responsibility and require occasional requests to be called-in or on stand-by. He emphasises the importance of managing this commitment, in terms of recognition and that the employer should not abuse it. Guest (2002) refers to the work of Hochschild (1997) and the temptation of organisations to use the promotion of work-life balance initiatives and practices to 'enhance commitment' to them. This is something that would have to be monitored to avoid mal practice in the future.

Relationships between employee and management are referred to on several occasions by both groups of interviewees as an essential operational factor in the adoption of work-life balance initiatives. On a more negative sense it was noted that it was due to the relationships between employees and their supervisors that meant they had a better opportunity of availing if of WLB initiatives if they 'got on well' together.

Communication was also highlighted in the findings of Drew and Daverth (unknown) in their ICTU briefing paper where they also conducted interviews of employees and senior managers. They found that given the role of HR, there was a 'communication/information deficit' of WLB policies and procedures to employees. Findings from the author's interviews with HR managers showed that communication had an essential role in the informal approval of WLB initiatives. In that, without communication from the employee to the manager about a WLB related issue, it was very difficult to plan accordingly or assist them with their issue.

One manger also offered an interesting angle in relation to the internal organisational factor of 'increased productivity' (Grady et al 2008), in his response when asked what the effects the external factors have had on productivity. He believes that since the restructuring, employees have arguably become more satisfied with their work-life balance. This, he explained was possibly due to the fact that they are still working the normal hours but now

being asked to do more in the same amount of time, and therefore go home satisfied at completing a full days work. This view could also be linked to the 'intensification of work' as identified by Grady et al (2008) as an individual factor in the adoption of work-life balance initiatives.

Analysis of research objective number 2:

Analysis of the second objective was based on the findings from a select number of questions asked in a survey of HR professionals. The background to the objective comes from research by Ollier-Malaterre's (2009) into organisational work-life initiatives. She conducted 44 in-depth interviews with HR officers, employee representatives, union official and other work-life service providers in France. It is from a section of these interviews titled, 'awareness of work-life practices within HR departments' (Ollier-Malaterre 2009 p171) that this objective was constructed.

This objective aims to assess the extent of awareness and appreciation of WLB initiatives amongst HR professionals, so it has been changed slightly, but does ask the question to a similar sample profile. As noted in the research findings a total of seven questions were identified to explore this area.

The first of two questions directed at 'appreciation' asked respondents to select whether they thought that the various WLB initiatives (asked in the previous question) assisted the organisation in achieving its strategy and competitive advantage. This question was derived from the work of Grady et al (2008) under 'monitoring and evaluating WLB policies and programmes' where they recommend that organisations should ask this question to measure and evaluate WLB initiatives at a 'programmatic level' (Grady et al p91). The purpose of which would be to obtain relevant data to benchmark WLB policies and programmes against similar organisations. The author's findings, when the question was asked to HR professionals, shows that 89.9% of the respondents said 'yes' to this question. This result demonstrates how important HR professionals rate the use of WLB initiatives and its benefits in relation to the organisations overall success. It also highlights why WLB initiatives should be

seriously considered by organisations as an essential performance tool. This point is highlighted in a study by Wang and Verma (2012) which indicate a product leadership strategy is more likely to adopt WLB programmes but a cost-leadership strategy is negatively related to WLB programmes. This is also an area worthy of further research particularly in the current post recession era.

Respondents were also asked to rate their 'appreciation' by rating a list of benefits of WLB initiatives in order of importance. The list was designed using a combination of factors that were identified in the 'Work-life balance in Ireland' (2007) study where line managers were asked about their perceptions of the benefits of operating WLB practices in their organisations. A combination of six benefits from private and public sector were chosen from the results. Then the question was adjusted slightly to ask HR professionals to rate these benefits from 1 to 6. As the findings show, 'retention of employees' was rated the most important (43%) this is in line with Grady et al (2008) summary of benefits, which has the same benefit listed as the second most reported benefit in both public and private sectors.

The next three questions in the survey were centred on what 'awareness' there was of WLB initiatives amongst HR professionals. Three questions were similar as they asked respondents to categorise their responses into either amounts or frequencies. The questions were again related to the work of Grady et al (2008) in terms of, 'measuring and evaluating at the programmatic level' (Grady et al 2008 p91). The findings from this papers survey are interesting, because the three questions highest responses were all similar. In terms of the awareness of WLB initiatives by managers and employees the result was 'Satisfactory', with 37%. In terms of promotion of initiatives and how often employees availed of initiatives, the highest results were both 'Sometimes', with 40% and 37% respectively. It could be argued that these responses highlight the lack of awareness from the respondents in choosing the 'easier option', or echo the findings of Ollier-Malaterre (2009) that most (French) HR have a weak knowledge on work-life practices.

The second last question referred to whether the respondent's organisations operated a, 'formal or informal' WLB practice. The result outlined that over 74% operated an informal practice. This result correlates with Fisher's (2000) definition that WLB arrangements can be both formal and informal. The result also highlights that even though 90% of respondents acknowledged that WLB initiatives assisted the organisation in achieving its strategy and competitive advantage, only 74% of them had an informal practice.

The findings from question 11, which asked the HR professionals to identify who administers the WLB initiatives, showed, the majority were administered by HR Managers (56%), with 46% by Line Managers. Interestingly, over half of the comments referred to the 'director' or 'MD', managing director being responsible for administration. This shows that some managing directors have yet to delegate this responsibility while others have a clearer understanding of who is responsible. Either way, the findings agree with Ollier-Malaterre (2009) findings who refers to previous findings by Dutton and Ashford (1993) that HR (officers) are 'gate keepers' for WLB practices, in that they select specific practices or, are capable of identifying new issues and then bringing these to the attention senior management.

Analysis of research objective number 3:

Analysis of the third objective was also based on the findings from a number of questions asked in the survey of HR professionals. This objective aimed to establish the benefits and barriers to older workers and identify the types of WLB initiatives availed by them. As noted in the research findings a total of five questions were identified to explore this area.

Question 2 and 14 were designed to gain an overview of the sample of the respondents and their general awareness towards WLB initiatives for older workers in their organisation. The findings showed that 35% of respondents estimated that there was only between '0 - 10%' of their workforce were aged between 55 to 64 years of age. If this finding is used as a 'snap shot' and compared to the 54.4% recorded in 2006 (Stratton 2006), as part of the

employment rate of older workers to reach the Stockholm target, it demonstrates a significant reduction in the number of older workers employed today.

Findings also showed that 87% of respondents indicated that they have no WLB initiatives in place particularly for older workers. This is possibly as a result of the breakdown of the social partnership agreement (Towards 2016) which was set 'to maximise the opportunities' for older people to participate in employment. This does also not reflect the recommendations in Forum's (2003) report, for The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment in conjunction with IBEC and ICTU to 'disseminate good practice in the provision of supports to older workers' (Forum 2003 p14). Responsibility has now fallen to the current government to commit to its 'National Positive Aging Strategy' in order to retain older workers in the labour market.

Benefits identified from the survey indicated that 'experience', (85%) and 'value and knowledge', (84%) were nearly tied as the main benefits of older workers. This agrees with a comparative study by van Dalen et al (2008) of four EU countries that showed the top consequence of an ageing personnel structure was an increase in 'know how and experience'. It is also in line with a recent report (Green Paper on Pensions 2007), which states that many employers value experience and loyalty of older workers and therefore seek to retain them beyond normal retirement age. The same report also highlights that this is particularly relevant in terms of 'relationships with clients and customers'. Interestingly the fourth most popular benefit, after 'loyalty and reliability' was 'benefits for customer relationships' at 42%.

The highest recorded response in terms of the disadvantages or barriers associated with employing or retaining older worker was 'outdated skills'. This is probably to be expected as 30% of older workers in Ireland are given 'general training', while only 14% were given specialist training specific to their employer according to O'Connell et al (2009). While there seems to be a lot of research that refers to stereotyping of older workers by employers regarding productivity, a "belief among employers that older workers want to retire as soon

as possible will hamper efforts to extend the working life", (van Dalen et al 2008 p6).

Lastly without going through each WLB initiative availed of by older workers, it important to note that an Australian survey conducted by De Cieri et al (2005), uses a correlation analysis of relationships between implementation of WLB strategies and employee usage. They found that 'the more WLB strategies available in an organisation, the more likely it is that employees will utilise the options available' (De Cieri et al p95).

Analysis of research objective number 4:
The fourth research objective is similar in background to the second except that it aims to assess the extent of awareness and appreciation of WLB initiatives for older workers in an Irish manufacturing organisation through semi-structured interviews.

The findings identified a variety of responses from employees, HR executives and the Operations manager. When both groups of participants were asked whether they had made or received requests to introduce WLB initiatives for older workers there was clearly some misunderstanding in terms of expectations. One HR manager said they would definitely consider it but suggested that this was really something to ask the employees about as they believed that on approaching retirement they didn't want to deal with it until the day they retire. Where one employee responded that they presumed the company would have a WLB initiative for older workers and even asks the question to the interviewer. This showed that they were not aware whether the company had initiatives and that they would prefer to have them.

Another manager said they had only received two requests in the past 12 years and they were both related to a 'wind down' arrangement. One was possible due to the persons office based role and duties, but the other was not due to them being on the operational side of the business.

This 'wind down' reoccurred and was suggested in the employee interviews, termed as 'phasing out'. One employee quoted;

"Phasing out from 60 onwards. Some would not like it, some want to stay longer! Maybe flexi time too. There are some guys who don't get a run, ye want to enjoy retirement, some retire and then die suddenly soon after. Try and get as much as you can..." 2A

One HR manager admitted trying to introduce a 'wind down' policy in the past, but explained that it just, "didn't fit with our business", (3B) being operational and following the recent re-structuring it was not possible to accommodate. However, a 'wind down or phasing out' does correspond with the 'Green Paper on Pensions' (2007) report that recommends this and other changes to working arrangements as solutions to facilitate further employment of older workers.

Appreciation of older workers was noted in the company's positive approach to the health of the employees, in that it offers bi annual health checks, a generous sick pay scheme and an on-site nurse and doctor. There was also recognition that they need to retain healthy older workers so that they can pass-over knowledge and work alongside those who need experience as they develop in their roles.

Overall, there was an acute awareness and appreciation of the value and knowledge that older workers have brought to the organisation over the years. This is evident today with many being asked to stay longer after official retirement to pass on their knowledge or work on projects that require their experience and skills. Having no formal WLB initiatives in place has not meant the management are neglecting their older workers but some guidelines on how to approach older workers prior to retirement should be considered. This would give assurance to employees and give clarity to each party as to their intentions, i.e., the company wanting them to stay longer or the employees wish to commence a phasing out process, or just to come off shift work after a certain age.

Limitations

The area of older workers was addressed in this study but it is an area that warrants further longitudinal research. A different approach would see more of a focus on older workers separately rather then work-life balance and older workers together.

One limitation of the study relates to the sample size in the interviews. A larger sample of employee's would have potentially allowed for greater insight and analysis into their thoughts towards WLB initiatives and their perceived benefits to older workers. Another limitation is that it would have been more appropriate to direct the survey at HR Professionals within other manufacturing organisations rather then a random selection of HR Professionals in different fields, positions and industries. This would have allowed greater analysis and comparison into the approaches of similar organisations.

Boundaries

One of the main boundaries of the study was that it only focused employees from one manufacturing organisation.

Chapter 6   Conclusions and Recommendations

This study set out to explore the various factors, external, internal and individual, that contribute to the adoption of work-life balance initiatives and their perceived benefits to older workers. Overall, following the completion of a literature review, interviews and a survey, a much deeper understanding of the topic has been gained. The broader area of work-life balance is well documented and researched, with a vast array of current literature available. The same cannot be said about older workers, which seems to be a less researched area in relation to work-life balance. Canada is one country that is leading the way particularly in relation to elder care and the EU acknowledges the importance of older workers in its 'Europe 2020' and 'Eurofound' projects. The current government does address the issue in its 'National Positive Ageing Strategy', and has already increased the age required to receive the state pension, but concerns have been raised as to the plans full implementation.

One important piece of recent literature on work-life balance in Ireland referenced regularly in this study was that of Grady et al (2008) and their best practice management guide to work-life balance policies and initiatives. The guide is user friendly, providing clear detail and understanding to the reader/organisation, on how best to approach, design, implement and evaluate a WLB guide in the workplace. In the foreword by the Director of IBEC, Brendan McGinty, he recommends that, "Implementing WLB policies and initiatives needs to be aligned strategically to the overall company mission and goals and a systematic and planned approach is best" (Grady et al 2008 pxiii). Our findings showed that 74% of HR professionals have an informal WLB practice in operation in their organisations, yet 89% believe that WLB initiatives assist in achieving the organisation in achieving its strategy and competitive advantage. Thus, giving clear indicators to organisations that this area should not be ignored and the promotion and introduction of a work-life balance practice is a worthy investment.

Although the contributing factors identified by Grady et al (2008) were detailed and were related to throughout the study, they were felt to be slightly broad. Especially when they were compared to the findings from the interviews, which related more to the operational side of work-life balance, an area that Guest (2002) suggests needs more attention.

The interview findings identified three overall themes: culture/commitment, relationships and communication. Analysis of the interviews would suggest that these themes, possibly treated as sub-factors, directly contribute to the adoption of work-life balance initiatives. The findings suggested that if these are not managed carefully they could create difficulties for employees and managers in creating or achieving an environment suitable for a successful work-life balance practice. This was clearly evidenced by findings that communication and relationships played an important role in the granting of leave or flexibilities. Therefore, it can be assumed that should a relationship turn sour due to a lack of communication, future requests may not be forthcoming or granted, leading to an imbalance or conflict. It is also an area of concern because management or the administrators could be viewed as biased towards certain employee's due to their known 'good' or 'bad' relationships amongst employees.

The acknowledgment by some managers interviewed and possible lack of concern, that no formal practice exists, is not too concerning as most of the employees clearly appreciate what the company has done over the years and rate their efforts very highly. The informal approach actually seems to work in both parties favour, as it leaves an open flexible attitude towards any potential issues that an employee may have in their personal lives.

A surprising finding from the data was the cultural link from the organisations informal approach to work-life balance, for over 75 years the company has reportedly had a positive effect on the local community and how it's perceived. The company is seen as a good place to work, in both Limerick and Drogheda and has 'always looked after people' or got 'ten out of ten' for its efforts in working with its employees over the years. These points lead to the question whether there are merits in having a formal work-life balance practice at all? Or

is it in the interests of the company to just act as 'stakeholders' and be flexible in their approach to their employee's work-life balance related requests? This informal approach may actually leave it better situated to deal with various different requests that may arise in the future.

It was also clear from the interview findings that there is a limited and conflicting understanding of the meaning of work-life balance in the organisation, which may have implications and make it difficult to formalise work-life balance initiatives in the future. Employee's perceptions of work-life balance initiatives tended to agree in that they associated it with, 'leave' or 'time off', but opinions varied slightly when it came to the awareness of how the procedure worked and whether there were any initiatives in place for older workers. This suggests a need for the HR department to promote or clarify any misunderstandings in relation to what work-life balance is and how it relates to employee's lifestyles. A recent promotion of work-life balance through the employer sponsored, 'Employee Assistance Programme' (EAP) in March 2013, identified tips by psychologist Robert Brooks and '10 steps towards balance with work and family' (EAP March 2013 flyer) shows that the company is aware of its benefits but lacks commitment to any formal practice.

It is acknowledged that there is current pressure on resources and managerial constraints following a restructuring that took place over the past 4 years. It is also important to acknowledge that even with external pressure to cease or suspend current flexibilities due to their cost, they have not been. This is most likely due to the defence of the HR managers who acknowledge that their existence and continuation has undoubtedly been reciprocated in good will and commitment from employee's in times when every little helps.

In hindsight, the interviews provided a wealth of data and knowledge and while a lot to manage, regretfully, some data had to be left out of the findings in order to keep in line with the research objectives and thesis specifications. It was also difficult to analyse them without the use of any software, therefore potential comparisons or additional findings could be present yet unknown due to the basic approach taken.

On a positive note, the interviews allowed for some genuine feedback from an organisational viewpoint on areas that need to be addressed and one would see value in completing a similar exercise in the future if permitted or requested to do so on behalf of their organisation.

It is hoped that the findings from the interviews do contribute to the theory, if only slightly, in the direction of trying to establish the themes identified in the findings further. They may also relate more to the 'operationalisation' (Guest 2002) of work-life balance, but never the less, an area worth further research.

There were several shortcomings in the survey that should be mentioned. Some issues with the wording and layout of the survey questionnaire were noted in the research methodology. The other area was the choice of sample population for the survey. Earlier in the research contact was made with the Irish Centre for Manufacturing Research (ICMR), this is a consortium of the leading Irish manufacturing organisations who collaborate to conduct research and innovation with the goal of ensuring Ireland remains as a choice location for further investment in Europe. Having made contact with ICMR, the author should have pursued this enquiry and sought to survey and analyse the opinions of HR professionals in similar manufacturing organisations, which would have offered a more relevant comparison, rather than surveying HR professionals from a wider audience and background. Due to time constraints and holidays this enquiry was not pursued.

The other major shortcoming was in analysing the results of the survey. A lot of time was spent in entering and configuring the results into the statistical software package, 'SPSS', but due to a combination of issues, like the constant difficulty in accessing it, insufficient guidance and understanding, along with time constraints this option was abandoned. It is thought that if this option and the variables were examined using SPSS, they would have lead to a positive contribution to the analysis of the survey findings and the overall conclusions of the study.

Yet the results from the survey are not without merit, as they do present an accurate opinion of the awareness and appreciation of work-life balance initiatives, in particular to older workers, by HR professionals within Ireland today. The response rate of 49% was favourable and the findings could be relevant to policy makers such as CIPD, IBEC, ICTU and possibly the government, should they re-establish a committee to review work-life balance in Ireland or further their commitments in relation to older workers.

Recent changes in the UK have shown that in order to give older workers real opportunity they abolished the default retirement age. It is recommended that a similar study should be conducted in Ireland to consider the merits of this, along with a clearly structured and realistic plan between the government, employers and relevant third parties like ICTU and IBEC. The research objectives should also include a review of the work, health and caring needs of older workers to encourage them to remain in the workplace and deliver more flexibility to the economy in the future.

The findings relating to older workers alone are also significant as they offer an indication of the views of both employees and opinions of HR professionals towards the benefits of older workers. While the perceived barriers to retaining or employing them are also recorded, it is important to use these as starting points to understanding and proactively dealing with this developing area in the future. It could be argued that some of these views may be stereotypical and unreliable, but they should not be ignored and suggest a need for a greater understanding in *where* to concentrate efforts in tackling this growing issue going forward.

On this basis, it is recommended that an online register for manufacturing organisations with work-life balance initiatives, be developed. Similar to a benchmarking practice, it would ideally allow participating organisations to share their work-life balance initiatives and other related industry examples. Organisations could remain anonymous if desired; include both formal and informal practices. Essentially, it would allow organisations thinking of introducing WLB initiatives to understand how they work in practice and even

provide a guide along with sample forms as demonstrated by Grady et al (2008). A particular section could relate to older workers, citing examples from other manufacturing organisations, with highlights of results and improvements following implementation. Sections for employees, family, community and graduates could also be included and offer additional links to various independent support services. A forum or blog could also be provided to allow organisations share their learning's. It is thought that the current website; www.worklifebalance.ie could act as a potential starting point to expand on.

Lastly, as the background and interviews were based on Irish Cement Limited and its employees, it is important to note that while its work-life balance practices may require some clarity, it has developed a culture and practice of informal work-life balance initiatives that is built on strong fundamentals like communication, community and relationships, commitment and trust. It is an organisation that has adapted to changes over the years, both internal and external, and showed it is flexible and capable of dealing with more challenges in the future.

To conclude, from a HR professional's point of view, work-life balance seems to be an area that has plenty of academic backing but is lacking on the implementation into 'real life' practice within organisations. This may be changing, with organisations such as, Yahoo and BMW leading by example, but there is a lack of examples from Irish manufacturing organisations. While these companies raise awareness to their own benefits, it is essential that the overall benefits of work-life balance initiatives and older workers be promoted to managing directors, HR managers and line managers in every industry and sector. IBEC and ICTU along with government support should lead this campaign, and not continue to wait for a framework committee to be re-established.

The responsibility should not end there. As identified in the findings employees have a major role to play also. Ultimately, this whole movement centres on them to realise and request or even demand the introduction of suitable work-life balance initiatives in their workplaces. Even on an individual level, the public

has a responsibility to educate themselves and their families on the benefits and start by making small changes to improve their own work-life balance, whether it be through work, the community or at home.

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Appendices – table of contents

Contents of Appendices   Page

A. Interview schedule

Interview schedule;

Interview 1

Role   Purchasing Manager
Location   Limerick
Setting   Office
Interview Group   A. Reference 1A
Date   Wednesday 31st July 2013 at 9.30am

Interview 2

Role   Temporary Systems Controller
Location   Limerick
Setting   Office
Interview Group   A. Reference 2A
Date   Wednesday 31st July 2013 at 2.00pm

Interview 3

Role   Mechanical Supervisor
Location   Limerick
Setting   Office
Interview Group   A. Reference 3A
Date   Wednesday 31st July 2013 at 4.00pm

Interview 4

Role   HR Manager and Quarry Manager
Location   Drogheda
Setting   Office
Interview Group   B. Reference 1B
Date   Friday 2nd August 2013 at 10:30am

Interview 5

Role   HR Manager Irish Cement Limited
Location   Dublin
Setting   Private home
Interview Group   B. Reference 2B
Date   Tuesday 6th August 2013 at 8:30pm

Interview 6

Role   Operations Manager
Location   Drogheda
Setting   Office
Interview Group   B. Reference 3B
Date;   Thursday 15th August 2013 at 3:00pm

B. Interview summary and questions – Group A

Group A interviews;

Interview employees or older workers in a manufacturing organisation (ICL) – the theme of the interview centres on 'the extent of awareness and appreciation of WLB initiatives amongst employees/older workers and their perceived benefits to older workers…'

Introduction;
The interview is being completed as part of the research database for a master's thesis in Human Resource Management with National College of Ireland.

Explain a little about WLB initiatives and older workers.

Work-life balance practices' are initiatives that are voluntarily introduced by organisations to facilitate the reconciliation of employees' work and personal lives.

Older Workers; The EU defines older workers as all workers aged 55 to 64.

This interview aims to gain an understanding of your views towards WLB initiatives in your organisation and the influence of (external, internal and individual) factors in the adoption WLB initiatives.

Assure them at their answers are nothing to do with ICL and only as part of my research into the masters. All answers will be kept strictly confidential and no names mentioned in the writing of the paper.

Thank you for participating.

Clarify their role in the organisation and how long they are working there.

Group A Questions:
I would like to discuss how the company deal with day-to-day issues that sometimes mean an employee has to balance their time between work and personal life.

1. How would you describe the companies approach to Work-life balance (WLB) in ICL?

   a. What are your views of the companies approach to WLB related issues?

2. Did you ever have any difficulty obtaining time off for non-work related events? Examples – weddings, funerals, illness of children, involvement in sporting/community events etc?

   a. If you were to rate the company from 1 to 10, (1 being poor and 10 being excellent) how would you rate the companies approach to dealing with WLB requests or issues?

3. Do you think employees appreciate and avail of WLB initiatives?

4. Do you think a more formal approach would be better or worse for both Employer and Employee?

   a. What improvements could be made?
   b. What initiatives do you think could be introduced? (Reduced hours, temporary work, term time.

5. In your opinion, should there be initiatives unique to older workers, (aged 55 to 64)?
   a. What type of initiatives would suit?

6. Do you think initiatives specific to older workers would benefit you as you move closer to retirement?

7. Would you prefer a formal approach to such things as 'job sharing' or 'leave of absence' as you get older?

8. Is there any specific arrangement / improvement you feel could make a big difference to your work life balance in the company?

9. Have you approached the company to make them aware of any suggested initiatives to see if they could work?

10. Do you think the company is aware of the need to have WLB initiatives in place for older workers?

All interview notes and recordings are kept strictly confidential and are for the purpose of research only as part of this thesis.

Name
Role   **Purchasing Manager**
Location   **Limerick Works**
Setting   **Office**
Interview Group   **A**
Date   **Wednesday 31st July 2013 at 9.30am**

I: Okay eh-
R: 31st July, 2013.
I: Yeah!
R: At five minutes to nine.
I: Five minutes to nine in Frank's office-
R: Yeah.
I: Interview for the thesis-
R: -thesis.
I: In Work/Life Balance and Issue.
          Okay Frank thanks very much for your time, I won't keep you too long now. So really I'm just as mentioned, I'd just like to discuss, I suppose the interview is for the thesis in Work/Life Balance for National College of Ireland. The interview I just wanted to gain and understanding of your views towards work/life balance in your organisation, and how the company deals with day to day issues; that sometimes mean you have to balance between your work and your personal life? So the answers are kept completely confidential, they're not-
R: -Open.
I: Open or I suppose in the writing of the report it will be detailed employee-
R: -Yeah.
I: And they will be kept separate, nothing to do with the company. So just, you're with the company how long Frank, yourself?
R: Almost seven years.
I: Seven years, okay. So yeah, again, it's just to get an idea of your opinion or views to how the company deals with day to day issues. So well kick it off anyway. So how would you describe the company's approach to work/life balance in Irish Cement?
R: 50:50. It's really get the product out first, and worry about the person afterwards.

I: Worry about the person afterwards, and is that, so it's kind of like the employee initiatives   or initiatives for employees are second to?-
R: -Yeah it's the product first and then employees second.
I: Employees second. So would that be a general view or your own opinion?
R: It's the general view.
I: Yeah?
R: You that, things have to be done, but generally over a long period you have to say something   has to wait and it doesn't. You know, what happens really is that we have to get the product   out at all costs.
I: Okay?

R: That's my view of it here, you know.

I: Because it's production-

R: Production Line-

I: Line-

R: -And limited supply, in here, limited capacity. You know that we only have so many silos and   if we don't keep the silos full then we could run short.

I: -Right?

R: So we really have to- so either we have less employees or we don't keep our silos full all the   time.

I: Okay?

R: That's my view of it-

I: Yeah?

R: So any time anything happens everything has to-throw everyone at throw everyone at   equipment. Generally that's nearly all the norm now at the moment.

I: So do you feel like, I suppose do you feel like, in your own experience have you ever had   any difficulty obtaining time off for non-work related events, if they I suppose came into a working time?-

R: Well really in my position now it's very hard to take time off because the work load will   always be there when you come back so-

I: Mm-hmm?

R: -like you know you either take time off and have multiple tasks when you come back and   multiple load or else not take time off and work through it and take limited time off when   the work load isn't too high.

I: Right?

R: You could not take anything more than a week, because when you come back from a week   it's just-

I: Yeah?

R: -work loads too high. Even a day off, you come back and you could have-

I: Your- you've enough work to keep you going for two days?

R: And the work trouble then is would the people that you leave behind em- follow the   strategy and the paperwork trail. I found that now, even today, they haven't.

I: Okay?

R: You know?

I: After a few days off.

R: When I find out that, you know, there's some things that didn't happen when I was off you   know?

I: Okay. Okay, so I suppose if you were to-

R   -Which is the same thing then that you worry then that if you do take days off that the same   thing will happen, that you have to re-go through the whole process again of what happened   asking   people,   because   your confidence in some of them isn't good.

I: Okay so this, in a way, this type of- would this deter you from taking?-

R: It would deter you taking off, because an example this morning was em- I got an alert from   the AP asking me about em-

     Turn it off there

[END]
Interview was interrupted and the remaining recording was inaccessible for transcription.

D. Transcript – Interview 2

Name;
Role;   **Temporary Systems Controller**
Location;   **Limerick Works**
Setting;   **Personnel Office**
Interview Group;   **B**
Date;   **Wednesday 31st July 2013**
Time;   **2.00pm**

Interviewee: (known as)
Position: Started as an Apprentice Electrician, then an Electrical Tradesman and finally as a Systems Controller. He took a redundancy package last November. He currently works on temporary basis with 38 years experience in Irish Cement Limited.

DB accepted to participate in the interview but requested that the interview not be recorded. When requesting DB to participate, a copy of the questions was sent to him prior to the interview, to allow him understand what the questions would be like. When the interview commenced he brought a copy of these into the interview. This made easy for both parties to follow the line and order of questions but a little difficult to veer off the questions when an opportunity arose to probe a little deeper into certain areas.

Start of interview:

1. How would you describe the companies approach to WLB related issues?

"First time I have heard of the term. Personally, I never had any problems in getting off. The companies approach has been excellent – from a personal point of view…and other employees would agree too. If someone had problems at home, never a problem, never an issue"

2. Did you ever have any difficulty obtaining time off for non-work related events? Examples – weddings, funerals, illness of children, involvement in sporting/community events etc?

"No – never, had a good boss – as in my immediate boss, my Supervisor (SM), I never went to a manager, I never had to. Work with them (Supervisor)"

2. A   If you were to rate the company from 1 to 10, (1 being poor and 10 being excellent) how would you rate the companies approach to dealing with WLB requests or issues?

"Ten! No issues."

   3.   Do you think employees appreciate and avail of WLB initiatives?

"Definitely. Not avail but taken when necessary."

   4.   Do you think a more formal approach would be better or worse for both Employer and Employee?

"Yes, for some people, some might not get on with a Supervisor, so a formal practice could be better so the employee knows they are available. There could be longer term issues, wife sick etc. No harm in a formal approach. Always good to have flexibility – yet again I wouldn't change anything that was working! It has kinda been there all along, works both ways – never an issue – never balgarraded it. Respected it, never a problem, even when I moved in the company, both Supervisors' were great."

        a.   What improvements could be made?

"Flexi time could work."

   5.   In your opinion, should there be initiatives unique to older workers, (aged 55 to 64)?
        a.   What type of initiatives would suit?

"Definitely agree, to come off shift around 55/60 (years old) shouldn't be doing it after that. Also, reduced hours, a gradual reduction in working hours, from five days to four etc."

   6.   Do you think initiatives specific to older workers would benefit you as you move closer to retirement?

"Work for 38 years, then gone! You should be phased out – from 60 down, a gradual reduction rather then all of a sudden stop."

   7.   Would you prefer a formal approach to such things as 'job sharing' or 'leave of absence' as you get older?

"Compared to what…if something happened, only needed for a period of time, depends on circumstances and length of time, can't leave a role un-replaced. If a guy needs time off, there should be some assurances that you

have a job there. Job share – would give more stability if only for amount of hours. Other guys know.”

8. Is there any specific arrangement / improvement you feel could make a big difference to your work life balance in the company?

“Phasing out from 60 onwards. Some would not like it, some want to stay longer. Maybe flexi time too. There are some guys who don't get a run, ye want to enjoy retirement, some retire and then die suddenly soon after. Try and get as much as you can, I'm happy now in life, but this might not suit other people.”

(Told a story about a guy who retired on a Friday, guys had planned a night out on the following Monday, but he died over the weekend. The guys ended up making a presentation to his wife)

9. Have you approached the company to make them aware of any suggested initiatives to see if they could work?

“No, never had to. Only phasing people out. Good to give people an option, option being the key word. Don't have to, but make it available. A formal option would make people more aware. I'm quite happy now and others, similar guys, doing a bit, happy to do a bit. Keeping active is key.”

10. Do you think the company is aware of the need to have WLB initiatives in place for older workers?

“I don't think they are aware, no. Yet doing they are doing it, but I don't think they are aware. The company have looked after a lot of people over the years.”

“Passing over knowledge is important, as days reducing, guys need to know they would be kept on while passing on knowledge. A young fella needs it, to have it passed on. Can't rely on old workers to know everything. I believe all info should be passed on. There was a culture of guys holding information, now gone, used it to hold themselves in a privileged position, every company has some.”

Interviewer: Anything else to add?

“No that's it.”

Interviewer: Thanks for participating in the interview.

END - Interview finished at approximately 3:30pm.

E. Transcript – Interview 3

Name;
Role;   **Mechanical Supervisor**
Location;   **Limerick Works**
Setting;   **Personnel Office**
Interview Group;   **B**
Date;   **Wednesday 31st July 2013**
Time;   **4.00pm**

I: Okay, so mmm. It's just a chat really. It's exactly, sorry it's 31st of July, interview with John O'Connell for the thesis in work/life balance. So mmm, John I was, I'll kick it off. –Em, So I suppose the whole objective really is to discuss how the company deal with day to day issues that sometimes you, an employee has to balance their time between working life and every daily type of issue between small and big things, so. -Em, really I'll just take you down through the questions we were discussing and I might probe a bit more, I might scribble a few notes as well.

So, I suppose how would you describe the company's approach to work life balance in Irish Cement Limited?

R: I'm not exactly sure as we said that I would have said that the lads getting time off is something that happens at home, say in my personal life and that.

I: Yeah

R: I find yeah, I've never, as I said to you, I've never had a problem anyway because I'd either have to approach Ray or whoever was my immediate supervisor and I have explained to him what the story was, over the years and they wouldn't, they've always, there's never been a problem about going, having to leave work for whatever the issue would have been, yeah, there's never been any problem with that.

I: And ah sorry, how long are you with the company just in terms of-

R: Altogether 19 years.

I: 19 years okay. So- and would you think- how, in terms of your view towards that, towards how the company manage work/life balance, how would you view it?

R: I think they are very fair.

I: Yeah?

R: I think they're very fair, they're fair. I have never not-I have never gone and asked for the time off or whatever for personal reasons and not gotten the time, do you know what I mean?

I: Yeah, yeah.

R: You can't get any fairer than that.

I: Yeah, yeah, no, no. Fair enough, yeah. Em- So did you ever I suppose maybe to answer the second question is, did you ever have any difficulty obtaining time off for any events.

R: I didn't, no, no.

I: Em- I suppose then if, if you were to rate the company from 1 to 10, say 1 being poor and 10 being very good. How would you rate the company's approach to dealing with work/life balance requests?

R: I would give it a 9.

I: 9?

R: <####################>There isn't a <####################> so 9.

I: No. Em- Okay and do you think employees appreciate and avail of work life/balance issues?

R: Appreciate? I think they avail of it definitely. Avail of it definitely. Appreciate? I think certainly whatever you -some people take it for granted they look at it like it's their entitlements but, if you want to look at it that way.

I: Yeah, how would you see it?

R: As a benefit, you know it's at the company's discretion whether they want to give it or not, so, yeah.

I: Yeah, and do you think it's abused then if people take it for granted?

R: Yeah, yeah. It can be abused, yes. It's open to abuse.

I: Open to abuse?

R: It's open to abuse unfortunately.

I: Yeah, and, and therefore do you think if a more formal approach would be better or work for the employer and employee?

R: Yeah, I don't know about what way you go about it to be honest. I don't- yeah, how would you formalise it if you are, how do you classify what is an event and what isn't an event for a personal situation?

I: Yeah, I suppose a formal would be that the different types and issues are made available to all employees maybe in a letter or on a notice-board or on the internet and then attached to those would be the guidelines into how they're taken, who you approach, what the requirements are?

R: A lot of people would have their <####################> either they've taken their procurement and that most people know, you know-

I: Yeah?

R: Their entitlement, there is, there is guidelines for that.

I: There are yeah, if its, if your immediate-

R: Immediate family-

I: -from there. And do you think there could be any improvements made to it?

R: I suppose it would be no harm now, I'm of that feeling that guidelines-

I: Yeah, well I suppose maybe basically do you think a formal approach would be better there?

R: Yeah, yeah. Do the people understand they're not coming in looking for something that they're not entitled to and then getting-

I: Yeah-

R: -coming in believing that they are entitled to it and then-

I: Okay. And what initiative do you think could be introduced if, if we were to go down, the company was to go down a formalised route. Like, do you open up options say reduced hours, temporary work, Eh- you know, flexi time maybe, things like this, do you think?-

R: Well, for, if it was to have a <######################>but I understand <######################> female employees that that would be more suitable for females but for men, that looks <######################>for child minding and that whatever-

I: Yeah, yeah?

R: That particularly from, in many cases, do you know what I mean

I: Yeah, yeah

R: Children and that-

I: As well so, but like I suppose in terms of flexi-time might be that for example you, you can dock:-

R: <######################>you can dock :-

I: -at 10 o'clock in the morning, you know if you want to do something in the morning you can drop kids off, or you have a-

R: That would be handy but, if its, its kind of not practical at the moment

I: Yeah?

R: You know what I mean?

I: Yeah, yeah. I suppose it's linked to the nature of the business in terms of production. Em-okay, so, you know we talked a bit about the older workers, we know you're not in that category just for the record!

RL   Yeah!

I: So we are-

R: Yeah, yeah, with a bit of luck.

I: So I suppose the other background behind this is that people are living longer-

R: Oh yeah!

I: You know we are; we are becoming more healthier, there's better drugs on the market, all that-

R: I know yeah?

I: There's different views on it out there and you have your own and also then, mmm, governments are changing state pension age in the UK and retirement age of 65 so you know they're trying to get people to work longer-

R: Oh yeah, yeah?

I: They need people to work longer so. Anyway, but -so in your opinion should there be initiative unique to older workers and I suppose I mean-

R: Well I know of one or two at the moment, and hopefully they'll be around when I, when I get to the age of the <#######################>,   be another <#######################> there recently there were doing a redundancy package and anyone of the age of 63 they were calling them in and said listen would you like to retire

I: Yeah?

R: And they said, I know two of the people that <#######################> well say I am only 63 and they said listen, we'll pay your wages and your salary and your pension entitlements up until you're 65 if you want to go now.

I: Seriously?

R: Yeah. Some of them get the same pay slip as us.

I: Jeez! And that was it then they were gone?

R: Yeah!

I: Wow!

R: So hopefully that might come in!

[LAUGHTER]

I: And, and, in terms then, so say okay maybe say that option wasn't available-

R: Yeah, yeah, yeah?

I: -so an initiative; would there be anything there that maybe you'd like to see in place in terms of making the balance of working life a bit easier and this might be

something that you know, you know over time reduced hours, no shift work, you know things like that?

R: In the present role that doesn't really apply, not at the moment anyway<####################> <####################> even though I mean if things pick up

I: Pick up, yeah, yeah-

R: Pick up-

I: So if you were to, say you stayed in your same role or another role as you went on, I suppose it links back to the previous section, would you prefer a formal kind of structure there that if you wanted to say, rather than working 39 hours a week work 30-

R: Yeah?

I: Something like that? You would be-

R: I would be interested in that, <####################>to have

I: Yeah and then, or not if you were doing shifts like have the option not to do it after a certain age.

R: Yeah?

I: Okay so I'll just, I'll move on. Do you think any-I suppose would be an issue to the -next question kind of links, do you think this is specific to older workers would benefit them as they move closer to retirement, as in ahh, if a guy was five years from retirement at three years with these type of initiatives if they are in place would, would help them?

R: I <####################> it would really help them adjust because like, if you -it's a big step going from working five days a week to nothing, you know, and a big step for any, any adjustment coming close to that has got to be of benefit.

I: Yeah. It would kind of help them?

R: Help them, ease them into it-

I: Yeah, yeah. Okay-

R: Obviously I mean anything like that would be a great benefit.

I: So would you prefer a more formal approach to things like various initiatives if they were:-

R: Yes, I suppose now I think about it yeah.

I: As you get older?

R: As you get older, yeah. At least you know that what- they give you a bit of assurance-

I: -Bit of assurance, yeah. That you can still continue working and- Okay, would there be anything like that the company should introduce in terms of work life balance that might make a huge difference in terms of specific arrangement or?-

R: No?

I: No?

R: Not really. No.

I: Could be anything really? No, no that's fine.

R: No I can't think of any but time off and that's it so.

I: Okay, so, I suppose you said it there, have you ever approached the company to make them aware of the issue, have you heard of another company or to suggest something to them?

R: No.

I: No?

R: <#######################>

I: <#######################>

R: <#######################> in-house

I: <#######################> or took it

R: -that took that package, yeah.

I: Nice. And was there a lot of people in that package?

R: <#######################>

I: I hear they were recruiting recently?

R: They did yeah. They started recruiting now again, yeah.

I: So do you think the company is aware of the need to have these types of initiatives, work/life balance initiatives in place for older workers. Do you think they are aware of, what workers are looking for?-

R: I   mean I would have thought so yeah. I mean I would have thought that over the last few years we'd have- with all the redundancies and that, because other people were coming saying could we do this and could we do that and go on different courses and things like that. I am presuming you to- do you know what I mean?-

I: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

R: If it had been coming with different initiatives, of what they'd like to do-

I: Yeah, yeah, no I-

R: <#####################> the company must have a clue of what people are thinking about around that age.

I: Yeah they are and maybe they aren't; you could argue the other side of it. It's just -it depends I think, in some ways maybe they, they're aware of it but they're not doing anything formally about it.

R: Yeah, yeah?

I: And in some ways they may think they are doing enough, so- really it depends on your take on it, so- so yeah it just depends but-

 Okay, so anything else you'd like to add?

R: Nah-

I: Nothing

R: As I explained to you; normally what they did down through the years that any- any good initiative that was ever within the company was always abused and ended up- ended up being taken away, do you know what I mean?   People- people abusing it.

I: Yeah. Do you think that's why there's no formal?-

R: I would imagine, yeah. That's why there's nothing there. I would think so.

I: Because it has been abused?

R: <#####################>

I: <#####################>

R: The afternoon leave, say someone- on a Friday, if someone wanted to go away on a weekend either Sunday evening <#####################> and say listen things are great, is there any chance I could go and <#####################> give<#####################>

I: Yeah, yeah?

R: <#####################>tomorrow and then Sunday evening you could be taking your wife for a drink or whatever-

I: Yeah, yeah

R: <#####################>at the weekend and the shift runs and you are on a different shift pattern, <#####################>

I: Yeah?

R: <#####################> shift on a Friday and there would be a good few foremen on a Saturday and then there would be a different foreman on a Sunday and <#####################>

I: <#####################> you would get every

R: <#######################>

I: until it was <#######################>

R: <#######################>   and   then   Sunday
night<#######################>

I: Yeah, yeah

R: Like to go on a Saturday then, you know go out on a Sunday evening.

I: Yeah?

R: They only meet up every so often, if you know what I mean?
I: Yeah, yeah

R: So like, abusing the system has kinda-
I: It's not worthy. Do you think that could happen now if a formal arrangement
came into place?

R: Em- I don't know with reduced numbers, maybe not, so,-
I: Yeah

R: The numbers are so tight now I think, so they have more control of it whereas at
the time you would <#######################>

I: Yeah?
R: You know they'd be, by the time it came around again you'd have forgotten
about it.

I: Yeah?
R: So, but now with the numbers you'd notice it straight away.

I: It's so small, there's only four there now.
R: Yeah, yeah.

I: Em-
R: But in <#######################> isn't it?
I: Yeah, like, I suppose it's-yeah. I thought it was much, there's probably other
factors there as you mentioned there redundancy and things that have, had a knock on
affect to it as well, so <#######################> do we do it? And I think-

R: <#######################>
I: So eh-I don't know whether it will happen again but, okay sure, if there's
nothing else, nothing else to be said?
R: No.
I: Okay sure we'll finish it there.
Thanks very much John.

R: No bother at all.

END of Interview

F. Interview summary and questions – Group B

Group B interviews;
Interview HR Professionals in a manufacturing organisation (ICL) – the theme of the interview centres on 'the factors contributing to the adoption of WLB initiatives and their perceived benefits to older workers…'

Introduction;
The interviews are being completed as part of the research database for a master's in Human Resource Management with National College of Ireland.

Explain a little about WLB initiatives and older workers.

Work-life balance practices' are initiatives that are voluntarily introduced by organisations to facilitate the reconciliation of employees' work and personal lives.

Older Workers; The EU defines older workers as all workers aged 55 to 64.

This interview aims to gain an understanding of your views towards WLB initiatives in your organisation and the influence of (external, internal and individual) factors in the adoption WLB initiatives.

Assure them at their answers are nothing to do with ICL and only as part of my research into the masters. All answers will be kept strictly confidential and no names mentioned in the writing of the paper.

Thank you for participating.

Clarify their role in the organisation and how long they are working there.

Group B Questions:

1. How would you describe the Work-life balance (WLB) practice in operation in ICL?

    a. Is it a formal or informal practice?

2. What is the companies/HR's approach to WLB related issues?

3. In your opinion, what are the main WLB initiatives that employees benefit from?

    a. Which ones do they mostly avail of?

4. What do you think were the main factors (external & internal) that contributed to the introduction of these initiatives?

5. Overall, have the initiatives proven to be beneficial for the organisation?
    a. In what way(s)?
    b. Has there been any increase in productivity with the use of WLB initiatives?
    c. Has there been any decrease in absence?

6. Has there been any external factors or changes (apart from the recession & redundancies) that affected the company over the past few years?
    a. If so, how have these factors/changes affected the WLB of employees?
    b. Have these factors had a positive or negative effect on the initiatives?
    c. Have these factors caused the companies view of WLB initiatives to change?
    d. Did the company introduce new WLB initiatives?
    e. Did they restrict access or availability to current ones?

7. Are there any initiatives unique to older workers, (aged 55 to 64)?

    a. If so, have these proved successful and how?
    b. If not, why?
    c. Do you think the company should consider introducing them?

8. Do you think the company would benefit if WLB initiatives for older workers would be introduced?

9. Have there been any requests by older workers for initiatives to be introduced?

10. Did you notice any increase in the number of employees availing of WLB initiatives or requests for WLB initiatives to be introduced?

All interview notes and recordings are kept strictly confidential and are for the purpose of research only as part of the thesis.

G. Transcript – Interview 4

Name;
Role;   HR Manager and Quarry Manager
Location;   Platin Works
Setting;   Personnel Office
Interview Group;   A
Date;   Friday 2nd August 2013
Time;   10:30am

I: Okay John, thanks very much, this is part of an interview for a thesis on Work/Life Balance for a Masters in National College of Ireland.

R: Okay.

I: Em- just you're in the role of HR Manager and-

R: Quarry Manager.

I: -Quarry Manager as well in Irish Cement. How many years are you with the company?

R: Eh- 13 years.

I: 13 year all right. Okay so I'll get started obviously all these notes will be keep private, confidential and it's nothing to do with the-

R: Yeah.

I: -with the company itself. So I suppose just to start the topic is Work/Life Balance and the factors behind it and little bit about the older workers end of it. How would you describe the work/life balance practice in operation in Irish Cement?

R: Ehh-

I: I suppose is it a formal or informal practice?

R: It would be an informal practice we would have here in terms of the work/life balance. I suppose it is also, probably be, a case by case basis typically. I mean you wouldn't necessarily have a em—a one fits all solution for everybody or it probably is depending as well, you know, the relationship between people within departments as well so it might, certain methods of dealing with any issues might have developed between Managers and their-

R: From previous occasions or?-

I: Yeah, I suppose you would be, so from that point of view we wouldn't have a structured formal system in place. So yeah it would be informal in nature.

I: Okay and do you think overall the companies approach to these types of issues, how do you think they handle them?

R: I would say we handle them pretty well; this is in my own view. Em- I could probably understand how it might be construed that it might be a more reactive rather than proactive

I: Right?

R: -approach to us, but I think, yeah I think the strength of it would people who are particularly demanding roles here-

I: Mm-hmm?

R: -really the way they are dealt with is their – that their immediate, the person they are immediately reporting to they would have, you know, quite a close working relationship with them.

I: Yeah?

R: And try and make sure that they deal with any situation within that context, rather than having to go, as you said, into any kind of-

I: Yeah?

R: -formal structure with your HR Manager.

I: This is mainly between the Line Manager as such and the employee?

R: I would-

I: Or is it Supervisor?

R: - I would think so yeah. I think the involvement of HR, HR wouldn't necessarily be involved in that many cases or situation, but is kind of support in the background if and when required, depending on-

I: So the first line would be the Supervisor?-

R: I would have thought yeah- very much supported by the developing good working relationships between the Engineers, Supervisors and Managers-

I: Yeah?

R: -and that they're all working together and assisting each other to make sure that they're allowing themselves to get the right balance between their outside life and the demands of the workplace.

I: And do you think then a more formalised practice or set of initiatives, you know available for everyone to see and understand would that be beneficial or?-

R: Well-

I: -would it help?-

R: Yeah it could well be beneficial em- I suppose in saying that I don't necessarily think that we, I don't think that we necessarily- that we don't do a good job at it, but at the same stage, yeah probably some more, maybe some more awareness and maybe a

little bit more information that might be given out through the workplace. I could understand how that, you know how that may help the situation. Em- yeah I could see the merits in it, yeah.

I: Okay and do you-what would be the main initiative that employees would avail off; work/life balance related in terms of maybe leave or?-

R: I think if there's any, if people are willing to work in demanding situations in their personal life, I think the thing that we general, doing back to their relationship with the people who work around them, most people here would be pretty forthcoming in terms of making that known to their immediate, their next- now if it's of a particularly personal nature they may not feel that that's appropriate-

I: Yeah?

R: -and in those case they may come to-

I: HR-

R: -HR Manager-

I: Yeah?-

R: -about it. Or they may go to somebody else completely different within the work place, looking for a little bit of assistance and then they are-it depends really on how-

I: Their relationship is or-?

R: Yeah and I suppose the point is; is there somebody in the workplace that they can go to, I would feel pretty confident that there is and I suppose then the question is it their working situation, obviously we will need to have control over that-

I: Yeah?

R: -so if somebody is high-lighting some concerns over their demands of work or maybe some dissatisfaction or something or maybe they're trying to look to improve the way things are in their working conditions. Obviously, okay we do have, we do have annual reviews which do allow somewhat of an opportunity for people to bring up concerns, you know and I suppose in terms of annual salary reviews and also management reviews, I suppose they're the only two formalised meetings between people and they're certainly important. Outside of that though what we would very much promote is people just-people opening the lines of communication.

I: Yeah, yeah?-

R: And I suppose from my previous roles I'd be pretty confident that that happens that people say "listen" you know "I have a certain commitment outside of work at the moment and I just need to manage it" and I think most work understands the person is first of all; once they're forthcoming with the information, the whole thing is communication—

I: Yeah, yeah?

R: -if they make you aware of the issue, there never is any issue in the future.

I: You can plan around it?

R: You can plan around it and you can say "well listen" you know "you can work then and" you know "maybe we'll rejig things a little bit for you or we do whatever" but then I suppose problems only where someone maybe hasn't made us aware of something and we notice some change in the relationship-

I: Yeah?

R: -and then where we actually have to make contact with them and then I suppose it is generally more formalised and it could be that somebody hasn't been performing in work or something

I: -different story.

R: -and then it's a different story. We do certainly make sure I suppose the

Managers are aware of the fact that they need to keep open the lines of communications.

Give them an opportunity to raise concerns.

I: Yeah, yeah?

R: And I suppose concerns, it sounds like it's done in a negative way, it also means that you try and be proactive and in that point of view, if you know somebody has some commitment a Manager would say, there's certain flexibilities in Ireland also given to, you know, if it's a day here or there as I said, and they don't want to high-light it too much, you know-

I: -they want to keep it discrete?

R: -they can-that will be done for them in that way.

I: Okay?

R: Yeah, yeah.

I: And do you think these initiative or flexibilities from the company has proven beneficial to them in terms of maybe it's increased productivity, maybe from an employee or-

R: Beneficial to person?

I: Beneficial to the employer of the organisation?

R: To the employer?- definitely beneficial to ourselves. I think like there are certain roles here and at certain times every role is demanding.

I: Yeah?

R: The nature of the business here of course is that we, we're not a nine to five business typically and that leads to its demands. Now okay you have certain people who are on shift work and then that's clear what their demands are but you also have a certain amount of people here who have to- who have to respond to issues out of hours, so that's

probably one of the highest profile things that we have to do, that's the most immediate and obvious effect on peoples personal lives.

I: Yeah?

R: And that's probably one of the biggest areas that you have to manage.

I: Mm-hm?

R: If we don't work with people on that we won't continue to get them responding favourably to the demands.

I: Yeah, yeah?

R: If you don't keep that relationship I suppose on an even keel and allow people to manage their work as stands well then, they'll quickly get frustrated with it. So I think we've proven down through the years that we can manage that situation because we continue to have people who both are very committed to Irish Cement and respond and prove that by responding at times-

I: -When they were needed?-

R: -unsociable hours and yet they also, they're committed to the company and also -they recognise that the company is committed to them. So I think it's a two way system there and I'm pretty confident that that, you know that we've proven down through the years that we can do that. Now having said that that's not to say that it isn't something that we can improve in the future or that we definitely need to adapt it in the future but I think we have generally done well with that.

I: And does this have any effect on attitudes as well, do you think guys are more?-

R: Ehh?-

I: -has it decreased that-

R: I think when people are, if you reach a point where people are honest and forthright about what demands they have outside of work –

I: Yeah?

R: -and you're honest about the demands that are in work well then if they keep up the communication generally they won't be in a situation where people will be particularly absent where you might be questioning them-

I: Yeah?

R: I think that you can avoid those situations, yeah so I think it does contribute to reducing the situations where people maybe feel that they, either because they have the perception that if suppose they're not being treated favourable or something or that they're having to be in work too much and that they need to take time off and they're not being given it, both types of situations are where people would possible be more absent. So I think we do avoid it-

I: Okay in terms of I suppose external factors or changes like there's been a lot of recession redundancies?-

R: Um-hmm?

I: Do you think any of these external issues have affected the company in the past few years? Obviously there's been a lot of change with redundancy-

R: Yeah?

I: But do you think you'd notice guys coming to you with different types of request or change in?-

R: Not a massive change really, except that I do- we do know, we do know that generally the morale, you know, in the company is probably lower than it was. I think in that in that that thought you have to look a little bit at the, you probably have to look at different sections of the workforce here-

I: Yeah?

R: - I think it's not necessarily the same at all levels in the company –

I: Yeah?

R: In terms of the em- it probably has, unfortunately if you have pressures where people have either lost jobs or the people – there was loads of people left behind, probably the demands have increased on them.

I: Yeah?

R: It has happened here and the people left behind also they have to deal with that and then also I suppose a subsequent pay reduction did occur here-

I: Yeah?

R: So I think it's a very challenging situation for people to deliver the same response and the same feeling that they'll be rewarded in work-

I: Right?

R: I suppose they probably feel that people's perception of their work/life balance probably the work part has probably been, their value in work has been eroded-

I: Yeah?

R: -now talking about work/life balance is more related, more related to I suppose balancing their time but I think in a lot of it comes down to peoples' perception-

I: Yeah, yeah?

R: -I mean if you're going home work thinking that you had a good day at work and you know- it's amazing how then you go home with a good mind-set and you're probably in a better mood at home so you probably feel balance. I think that has been eroded a little bit, I think we have, in the circumstances we've done probably as best we can, in terms of keeping the people, keeping a reasonable balance, but I've said that, you know, people are under a reasonable amount pressure in their role but we try to, we're as understanding as we can been over that and I mean people can only do what they can do

when they're in work and as long as they're –as long as they're committed in work and doing the job to the best of their abilities really then, there's nothing more people can do.

I: Do you think the company feels towards this work/life balance type of initiative; have changed it all in the past few years?

R: Our approach probably hasn't changed, I wouldn't think. It hasn't changed really having viewed the situation. The situation maybe, probably, is presenting itself a little bit more-

I: Yeah?

R: -and having said that maybe we're dealing with a slightly more negative attitude.

I: Yeah, yeah?

R: Attitude to the work place.

I: Could you introduce any other initiatives?

R: We haven't really introduced any new initiatives, we haven't changed our approach to it or initiated and initiatives.

I: Okay. Is there any initiatives that you find, I know there's not a set as you said it's an informal practice there, but is there anything unique to older workers and I'm talking like the guys how are 55 onwards and for example guys coming off shift or you know, changes like that or kinds of work, in terms of working hours to give them the flexibility. Are there any of those type of?-

R: Well I suppose if you're in a situation where somebody is approaching retirement obviously there's certain support given to them.

I: Yeah?

R: -in terms of preparation for retirement like of course, to prepare them for that. I think generally it probably still comes back to the fact that any of those thing-most of those things are still dealt with in the context of their relationship of the person they're reporting to.

I: Right?

R: I suppose we don't, right now probably we haven't gone through significant restructure and we probably haven't had many people in that bracket over the last few years so it's probably a little bit difficult to comment-

I: Yeah?

R: -We had a big clear our unfortunately and probably because of the manner of that a lot of people who wouldn't have necessarily seen it coming has to deal with retirement and I suppose you know obviously that would, it might be nicer if people know more about it in advance but that was just the nature of the-unfortunately.

I: Do you think the company would consider introducing the same in the future when the majority of the workforce might be coming close to that, do you think it would be a good thing?

R: Yeah I think, I suppose it could be something we could consider how we might, I suppose I'd probably, we'd probably need to see what the view from the, it might be something that you'd have to ask the work force about and say is it something that they feel- a lot of people, a lot of people even as they're approaching retirement don't want to deal with it until the day they retire. I mean- I suppose you could say if somebody, the other thing about it is you are working until the day you retire and you could argue that, you know, if you have good work/life balance, you should have good work life throughout your career-

I: Mm-hm?

R: -it shouldn't just be, you know the last few years "oh now I'm thinking about my work life balance" and "now I have to think about my health" and "no I have to think about my"- I mean we do also- another thing which is related to this like is, is the fact that we the health screening.

I: Yeah?

R: I think that's been a proactive way of telling people we're not concerned about their health in regards to getting them to work-

I: Mm-hm?

R: We're concerned about their health because you know, if they, they have to think about their health in terms of their own life, their own- and being able- and for them to be able to attend work over a long career. So people have to look after their diet, they have to rest, they have to exercise. If they're not doing those things em- the other issues in work will have, you know if somebody has a better balance outside work, you could say, well we don't have any control over that but we do in that if we can inform people of that. So I think in fairness our health screening probably, maybe I hadn't mentioned that, that would be a formal method of promoting work/life balance because people are given an opportunity I meant the other thing is I suppose we do have a Company Doctor here as well.

I: Onsite a nurse-

R: And a nurse and that means that people have access to health information which in a lot of other work places they wouldn't. Now it's the nature of our business that people are probably exposed to more hazards then you know then certain other work places- Employee Assistance Program so that means if people feel that there's nobody here they want to talk to, a confidential I suppose counselling service that is offered and so we would be- if people approach me I would certainly make them aware of that-

I: to promote?

R: -to promote, because if they don't feel there's anybody here to talk to, even including myself-

I: Yeah?

R: That would be their best port of call and as I said a lot of people would also use the nurse and the doctor to speak confidentially about things.

I: Okay, so have you noticed with I suppose the changes in your work force and the changes in culture and morale you mentioned, has there been any unusual requests coming through from employees in terms of trying to manage their workload?

R: Em- probably not unusual- this is probably a little anecdotal, it's difficult for me to say it, like that I'm in this role two years and I was previously Maintenance Manager so I've probably seen it a little bit in a few different places but it might be just that, as I said that, they might be more likely to comment on it in terms of the affect, because as I said there is peoples' perception of their value in the workplace has probably been challenged a little bit-
I: Yeah?

R: So they might be, they might make their feelings known on occasion a little bit more than they might have tended to before-

I: Yeah?
R: You know, so it might be the thing well you know ah sure I'm having to work- I have to work these hours, why do- what's in it for me-
I: Yeah?

R: -but generally speaking though, I mean sometimes that frustration comes out in possible from a few different people and they might make their feeling known but I haven't really seen any particular change in that. Mostly the people here are still well paid, so in terms of that value I think generally speaking people here are well paid so the company does show them that they are valued, but as I said more than that, if you get away from a monetary thing, I mean the question is; is peoples' good-work recognised here? I would say it always is, I would say, okay sometimes you know, you tend to move on to the next thing but I think generally speaking myself and other mangers would always make sure to recognise peoples commitment and as I said to recognise it also with giving them some flexibility. I think you know if people who got a little bit above and beyond the call of duty that is always recognised and is always remembered and noted like by Management, so no I don't think there's any massive change in- maybe it happens a little more often that people might comment on things but I think then it all comes back to communication, have the ability to communicate with people. To make them understand the issues that the company is going through and also then offer them the support that best comes from the people in the immediate vicinity of somebody in their job like. I mean if they have good support in terms in terms of either getting good training-
I: Yeah?

R: -so you know that comes back to performance management. If they're actually raising and issue we need to respond to it. So that's what performance management allows us to track. You know are they trained properly for the job? Are they- have they got reasonable resources within the department, but have they got reasonable resources? Are their people trained to do their job? So it's all those things that contribute to somebody that they're being listened to and that they're part of a proper organisation.

I: Okay, I don't think there's anything else unless you want to add anything else?

R: No I think that's it.
I: Thanks very much.

END of interview

H. Transcript – Interview 5

Name;
Location;   **HR Manager Irish Cement Limited**
Setting;   **Private home**
Interview Group;   **A**
Date;   **Tuesday 6th August 2013**
Time;   **8:30pm**

I: I have a copy of these if you want to have a look at it.

R: No, you're grand, you're grand, you fire ahead.

I: Okay, so, mmm, thanks Nicola. And obviously the, this is all kept

R: Yeah, yeah, yeah

I: Just for the reasons of a thesis more than anything else:-

R: Oh yeah, I know what you mean, yeah

I: Confidentiality, ahh, all kept separate. Mmm. So, sorry, just to kick it off I suppose how would you describe the, the work life balance practice or the company's approach to work life balance in Irish Cement.

R: Okay, well I would say that mmm, it is probably an informal set-up in relation to work life balance. For example, as you know we do not have a handbook with work life balance, you know, policies. We have not gone out there selling any of our policies. Mmm, you know, to say, like we wouldn't be, we wouldn't consider ourselves kind of a Google or a modern enterprise.

I: Yeah

R: So, I suppose taking that in, bearing that in mind, mmm, as a well established traditional company I think we would hope that we offer our employees a pretty good work life balance.

I: Yeah

R: Em, there are times when our employees have to work really hard during certain periods of the year, like if we have kiln overhaul as you know.

I: Yes, yeah

R: And we try to recognise that by in small gestures and small ways but trying them little bits of time off, or you know maybe a voucher or something saying look you have to go over and above. But, we don't have a section of work life balance policies

I: Yeah

R: Mmm, having said that we actually are pretty progressive in our leave policies.

I: In terms of?

R: In terms of, we offer, we have marriage leave, we have mmm, ahhh:-

I: Paternity leave

R: Our marriage leave is 5 days which is very generous

I: Yeah, yeah

R: We have ahhh, full maternity pay for every child which our sister companies don't have, they only offer maternity pay for the first child.

I: Right

R: So, and by that I mean top-up of your maternity pay to your full pay. Mmm. You know we do strive, obviously a fairly low population, mmm, well we had a very low female population, after the re-structuring it's probably slightly higher than before but it used to be only down around 6% so, mmm, I'd say we're now at whatever about 15%. But anyway, even with that said, mmm we do try to accommodation parental leave, you know, and things like that. So, also the fathers get 3 days for every child. But we do work with people, we try to work with people as I said in an informal manner so we would know the personal circumstances of almost every employee. And if an employee has a sick child or a child with :-

I: Yeah, yeah

R: particular difficulties, you know, questions, we don't ask questions, we work with people and try and:-

I: On a confidential basis

R: On a confidential basis. So their manager and HR people would know it, not necessarily their union may not need, may not be involved at all even though they're heavily unionised

I: Yeah

R: And mmm, sometimes you would involve the union because the decisions we make may affect em- other colleagues. For example I am thinking of one chap:-

I: Yeah

R: Yeah, who have a child with severe disability and he needs to be excused from the calling system, because he just cannot be called in out of hours at certain times because he needs to be there. They don't have cover for the child, and his wife can't lift the child now. So, that had to be explained to the union and explained to the guys. You know, and kept quiet. And kept respectable. So-

I: So do these guys recognise this and kind of acknowledge, even though it's an informal, you know, it's an informal practice there but do you think they all recognise this and kind of acknowledge it as a prerogative or, how do they feel?

R: Mmm. I-

I: How do the you think they see it?

R: I don't know. I would be very interested to ahh, to find out for sure because things are so different in the company now but I can, because obviously we have had strikes and we have had a lot of change. But if you had asked me this question a couple of years ago and asked anyone in the surrounding areas in Drogheda they would have said it's a brilliant place to work. And that wasn't just down to wages. It was down to looking after people, it was down to you know offering their sons and daughters job, work placements and all that sort of stuff, apprenticeships and that which is all stuff that we tried to do. So we try to be heavily involved in the community. Now I don't know if that falls in under work life balance but:-

I: Yeah

R: It, you know people do feel that they can, they don't just leave work at work or home at home:-

I: Yeah

R: You know, it is, it used to be certainly considered one of pretty big family, you know, mmm.

I: You mentioned there that, that I suppose the community and maybe things outside of work

R: Mmm

I: Ahh, what would you think were the main factors whether it be external or internal that contributed to the introduction of these initiatives or flexibilities, you know was it ahh, was it a culture or things that just happened to

R: Mmm. I think it was the culture of the place. You see I suppose if you think about it, over the years, it's 75 years now this year, the company, and mmm, I think that it started off very local and you'd get a family and they'd be pretty good and then their, you know all the uncles would be employed, then all the grandchildren would be employed and mmm, so there was quite a family orientated approach and mmm we were again, we were heavily unionised but we had pretty good relations with the unions and it always was the tradition that you would look out for people, you know, for example there are stories of people who may have had difficulties with alcohol and:-

I: Yeah, yeah

R: The company and the union would have been working to try and help these people:-

I: Get over it

R: Yeah, get over it without getting fired. Do you know what I mean? So we, we were never a company which just said off you go and out you go, you know, so I don't know-

I: No, yeah, yeah

R: Is any of that relevant?

I: And and ah, just you, just on:-

R: So what contributed towards it is what you asked me. I don't know. I think it was simply that

I: -Over time

R: We were very tightly knit to the community.

I: Mmm.

R: And there was a, a general mmm approach whereby you tried to help employees

I: Yeah

R: Yeah obviously without mmm employees, equally employees who

I: Yeah

R: You know, tried to swing the lead as we would say, would have been called out, you know because we were that involved in the community we would hear back that so and so was you know out working silage or whatever you know.

I: Depending on the time of year.

R: Yeah

I: Just I suppose, how, you mentioned there like obviously there has been redundancies and recession over the past few years but, mmm, how did it affect the company as well in many ways in structuring and the whole layout about how the job is. Mmm. How do you think they have affected the, these factors if you like affected the work life balance of employees

R: Yeah I think that mmm if I just take you back a step further I think that traditionally people had very good work life balance, almost too good work life balance, you know as in work may not have been pushing people as hard as they could have as the place got more automated the jobs became a little bit easier and gradually we had to start reducing the number of employees so that people were genuinely gainfully employed like. Mmm they used to call Irish Cement the jam in Drogheda because they basically said that it was such a good number you know so we had to, you were paid well, you didn't have to work terribly hard so we had to obviously change that and mmm it changed in the boom would you believe when people, there was an awful lot of demand put on people, people had to work really long hours. So particularly our tradesmen you will find, if you asked one of them what their work life balance is like they would say that they just, they worked, and worked and worked and worked such long hours. Yeah, now they were fairly well rewarded but they all worked building their own houses and everything. Mmm. But now they're working very hard because there's less of them. You know so there are a certain core people, core groups who have always had to work very hard and are professionals our engineers and that, they have always, had to work very hard. I think there's an ethos in the company in the last 20 25 years of mmm work hard, play hard.

I: Right

R: I think it changed and I think that it you know it's always been a very macho company

I: Yeah

R: And mmm, you know you just have to have stamina to stay there.

I: To get on

R: You know, so I think that mmm, what I was saying at the beginning is that I think the management did respect that people worked very hard and do work very hard and long hours and particularly pull every

I: Yeah-

R: -and I think that that's why it's really important to mmm you know try to accommodate holidays, be as flexible as possible, try to work with people:-

I: Yeah

R: that work hard, you know depending on production demands. So in recent times, obviously things are tougher and mmm

I: Has this changed the company's view to leave or at least flexibility at all

R: I'll put it to you this way. We have had to fight to keep these flexibilities. Because obviously they cost us money.

I: Yeah

R: And they are very easy things to cut.

I: Right

R: You know. So, we have had to fight and I'd say it will be an ongoing fight. But my attitude in my particular position is, you know, you can't, it's very hard to take away what you've given already. If you've already given like, it's very hard to turn around and cut:-

I: Discontinue it

R: So you need to find other ways to, to make your money. And they mean a lot to people. Like it means a lot to a guy to know that he has an extra few days holidays in the year if he is getting married for example and wanted to go a honeymoon, or whatever, you know, mmm

I: So we have, has the company restricted access or availability to-

R: No they haven't but it's been a fight as in its constantly being examined.

I: You haven't introduced anything new either?

R: No, they haven't introduced anything new, no. They're only into, all those leaves, all those sweeteners as you say, ahh, were introduced in the boom times.

I: Okay

R: Right, so, right in the middle of the boom the 90 or the early noughties you know

I: Yeah, yeah, yeah

R: And we have managed to hold onto them now, so hopefully we will continue to manage, continue to hold onto them, but we've always had a very good system with the annualised hours for people getting time off-

I: That's more-

R: And managing their, yeah, and managing their work life balance you know.

I: Yeah, to, to

R: And managers have always been as accommodating as possible.

I: Mmm. Do you think managers play a big role in managing:-

R: Yes

I: things on the ground.

R: Yes, definitely

I: The line manager or

R: They do. Or not managing it. Do you know what I mean. If it's falling apart it's usually because the line manager is not managing it you know.

I: The most, sorry, I suppose you

R: We used to have a system as you know, right, where we had the overtime-

I: Yeah

R: system and people were basically dragging their heels to earn more money. Okay. We changed that and with negotiating with the union we got the annualised hour system which meant everybody knew what they were going to earn regardless of what happened during the month which encouraged people to do the job in the most efficient manner possible. And get out. Which did improve probably a lot for people, you know, and so on. Mmm

I: And they had the pay and that guaranteed

R: Guaranteed and you know, there was no more messing going on. The other thing I think is, ahh I don't know if it's relevant to work life balance at all but I have noticed that the fact that the guys don't get their full salary up front there is a certain amount withheld for shares. And they can't get access to those shares for 3 years has meant that on the ground people have put their children through college who wouldn't ordinarily have. If you asked the guys what they did with that money, they'll tell you it's shared:-

I: It's the share bonus

R: Share bonus put their kids through college.   Now has that anything to do with work life balance? I don't know or is it just a perk in the company?

I: No-

R: I don't know

I: I think it's kind of it's a perk that kind of leads into the work life balance and you said it works for the community-

R: Yeah, yeah, and scholarship scheme-

I: So, I suppose obviously, has the company seen a lot in relation to the annualised hours productivity, has :-

R: Productivity dramatically improved, improved with the introduction of annualised hours

I: Mmm

R: Like, not only did it allow people you know a better work life balance and a more predictable work life balance but it, it improved productivity definitely it would, it wasn't win win. Now bar one group which would be the mechanical tradesmen, they would say that, that mmm, they ended up with more work, you know that they were, they were better off on the older system. Possibly true. I don't know.

I: And do you think there was an effect or decrease in accidents with these type of initiatives in terms of ahh the leave that employees were giving back the goodwill and you know alternately with they chose their leave when they-when they could take it

R: I don't know if I would stretch it that far being honest. I think the decrease in absence levels happened because of absolute strict management.

I: Mmm.

R: You know, I, any time you take your eye off absenteeism it tends to creep, creep back up and it only takes a couple of people who don't want to come in after a football match you know. If they know they're being watched they will come in. So, I I don't know if, if it does or not. I mean as, you know when you look at work life balance on a, ahhh professional level say for people, you know engineers accountants and all that, they do get an awful lot of support for their career:-

I: Yeah

R: You know so, and and they get time off to study for exams and stuff like that

I: Yeah, yeah

R: So, you know, does all that contribute to work life balance does that all fall under it I don't know

I: Yeah, I suppose it does as well if the company are helping and or supports them financially in doing those kind of courses but

R: But like, in truth I think that the more, like I was thinking about this when you were saying you were going to ask me about it, and I was thinking very strongly that I feel, if I look at the professionals in the company as opposed to the tradesman and the general operatives right who work on a clock in system and:-

I: Yeah, yeah

R: you know are tied to particular hours

I: Yeah

R: Graduates, engineers, all our professional people, I notice a trend, all you know, it takes until they get into their 30's to manage the work life balance properly. I notice that they come in and they want to prove themselves, did it myself

I: Yeah

R: and work extremely long hours and it's a crap work life balance because really it's all about work. Now people might say they don't have as much going on in their private life maybe:-

I: At that time

R: you know with kids and stuff:-

I: Yeah, yeah

R: It's all about work. But I find that as part of our graduate programme and as part of training for younger professionals or newer professionals they have to be thought to manage their work life balance. You know that they have to be responsible for that:-

I: Including time management and

R: and stress management and you know that it can't all be about just work work work the whole time. And I feel that from my own observation as a HR professional that when they get into their 30's, by the time they get into their 30's the, most of our senior and our strong managers are very good at managing the work life balance you still find a few people who do extremely long hours no matter what you say to them. You can't seem to get them into, you know to understand that that's not what we want from them you know. Mmm. But a lot of the senior jobs are very demanding and I think that it is something that I sorry not I think, it is something that work on with people on a continuous basis as they move up the ladder. Because the more senior they are often the more responsibility they have, the more demands there are on their time and they really want them at that stage to be able to manage their work and their life and the whole balance but you know for hours that they can't function for us-

I: So they-

R: You know as professionals. Do you know what I mean?

I: Yeah, yeah, no I

R: So even up right up to the MD you're trying to assess how a person can cope with stress and you know:-

I: The workload

R: Yeah

I: And mmm, would you think the company or whatever look at, do you think the company will continue they way it is or will they ever consider in the future actually formalising the process or is it working the way it is don't change it? As in would they ahh,

R: I don't know. Would they, would they

I: Would they ever see any benefit in formalising it and making everyone aware if these are the type of initiatives that we offer, this is how you go about getting them, all available on the internet

R: Yeah

I: You know

R: Possibly very possibly.

I: Mmm

R: Like it would be sort of a, yeah I think we should always be aspiring to be more, to complete that employee handbook

I: I'm not saying it's <######################>

R: Yeah

I: But I suppose what I'm saying, I think it suits some companies and it doesn't suit others

R: Yeah I think yeah, I don't know, I think my concern in relation to the work life balance is as a HR person right, what I get concerned about is making sure that within the various groups of general operatives, tradesmen, professionals, manager that there is, that no-one is being overworked.

I: Yeah

R: Right and that because someone is a willing horse that the managers don't keep after that person

I: Yeah

R: So, we have the policies, we have all that in place, as in we have some policies in place. Mmm. Could we possibly do more, perhaps but I suppose really my concern is to, to sort of make sure that people you know are watching out say younger professionals that they're not, they're not being over worked and that they do understand that's not what we actually :-

I: That's another section yeah

R: You know

I: Sorry, now I'm just switching over to the last couple of questions in terms of the older workers and I know there's been a lot of change in the company:-

R: Yeah, yeah, what older workers?

I: Yeah, the older workers are gone you know. So, I suppose in that, is there any initiatives that have been unique to older workers. Mmm.

R: Not really. We did, we have, we would have liked, I would have liked to introduce a wind down policy you know for people

I: Yeah

R: But it just didn't fit with our business you know. And ahh

I: Retirement

R: Yeah like where they'd work 3 days a week and you know just wind down gradually. But you know in general that is something we looked at but we didn't adopt it in the end.

I: Just because purely the operational side of it that wouldn't allow it.

R: In the operational side you either need somebody there, you can't match, every job is there because it needs to be there

I: Yeah

R: And it's very hard to match that, if you have someone on 3 day week who's going to do the other 2 days. And I mean are you stressing a person out more by you know-you know you're taking the responsibility away but who do you give that to and where does that go? So, unfortunately because of where we are now, we're so streamlined and headcount is so tight

I: Yeah

R: That everyone who is there is there because they are needed and when they're gone somebody else has to be there to replace them full time.

I: And that's it

R: Yeah

I: And would this be something I suppose <######################> the number of employees in years to come if they stay with the company will end up ahh coming to retirement age around the same time

R: Yeah

I: Do you think there would be something that could be introduced in the future, or look at.

R: I don't know obviously we have the pre retirement course and and that sort of thing but mmm I don't know and especially with employee working, like you would like

to think that I suppose is what I'm saying but it hasn't happened and it has been looked at a good few times so I'm not convinced it will happen. Having said that if people have to work to in their 70's you know,

I: Yeah

R: In the future like will they be able to work until they're 70 on a 5 day week I don't know, you know

I: Physically as well as

R: Yeah

I: anything else.

R: You know

I: Mmm. Ahh, okay I suppose I was gonna ask you:-

R: I would probably err on the negative side to that one, do you know what I mean, I don't know that it will happen.

I: Okay. Has there been any requests actually from lets say older workers over the years in your experience for these type of things to be introduced or

R: Yeah. Well I, I certainly know of 2 people who asked for it in my time so that's in the last 12 years who have asked to, kind of do a wind down thing and we would have liked to do it, liked to have done it, now, as you know we did do it with George

I: Yeah

R: You know, but that was kind of, we were able to do it in that particular case.

I: Yeah

R: Just because we happened to have some extra people

I: Available

R: Available to <####################> you know at the time

I: Did that case benefit do you think

R: The person-

I: The person-

R: Bar one

I: and the department. Yeah

R: Well it benefited the person. I don't know whether it benefited the department but it made it easier for the person to

I: In terms of passing over knowledge on a gradual basis as well and ah

R: Yeah. And it made it easier for that person to get, like this was a personal thing, not for the department let's be clear. So the reason this was done and I don't mind saying it because it's, like it was still very nice thing of the company to do in a way

I: Sure

R: Was to allow the person to get used to not being in work 5 days a week. And this person would have been a person who I would have thought didn't have a great work life balance because they were there all the hours that God gave all the time

I: Yeah

R: So almost we were trying to wean that person off work, you know

I: Yeah

R: Get them used to spending more time at home, you know. But like it did benefit, well the person benefited so<####################>

I: It helped

R: Yeah.

I: Mmm. Okay. Are we, are we?

R: We use coaches, the only other point I'd make to you is we do use professional coaches to help and to probe and to assist our senior managers. Because our senior managers now are doing a multi multiple roles in one because of our re-structuring and mmm there is a lot being asked of them in relation to moving and relocating and families are here and they are based in another place

I: Yeah, yeah

R: All of that, like if you ask them do they have a good work life balance you may get a myriad of different answers.

I: Yeah, yeah

R: And so we do try to assist them because you know it's not the ideal set up for a lot of them where they have their family living in one place and their job is in another and that is only going to get worse as they move up in CRH

I: In the firm-

R: Yeah because they are gonna be asked to travel further and further. So, we do try to assist them where we can, like by financial compensation and that side of things but also with coaching and you know, in that way I suppose.

I: Yeah, yeah. Does CRH recognise that as well. In terms of moving people around

R: Yeah but I suppose isn't it a bit cleaner in CRH because they're, it's a bit, you and your family are all relocating to China. So then there's the whole of the support systems that go with that. It's much more tricky when a guy is leaving his family in you

know Dublin and is flying out to Finland or the Ukraine or whatever so they're actually still resident and paid in Ireland but they're-

I: Work week

R: they're working abroad. And that is the case for a lot of the very very senior professionals and these guys live on their laptops, live in computer, live in airports rather and mmm you would certainly question work life balance and you'd, like they would have like, sort of reminders in relation to you know their fitness, you'd be looking after their health and that sort of thing

I: Yeah

R: like really obliged to do that because you are sending people all over the world

I: Yeah, travelling that much

R: But like I don't know, it's, it's a company now where there's limited opportunities in Ireland. So, every one of us in the company knows we're gonna get a knock on the door and if we don't we'll kinda be wondering why we didn't, you know, so like. I think a very interesting question would be if you were to ask people who work in Irish Cement partners or girlfriends or you know spouses or whatever what they think the work life balance is because I think you'll find that senior people or people in positions of responsibility work extraordinarily hard.

I: Yes

R: And long hours, and you know-are very dedicated to the company and they might say there is not great work life balance you know.

I: Yeah, yeah

R: So, I don't know but I think that that, <####################> maturity

I: Yeah

R: Which allows you, it is a maturity thing I think whereby people say no I can't do that and I have an awful lot on or you know it's something you have to actually learn almost

I: How to handle it

R: How to handle the increased responsibility and the increased workload. That's something I always watch for in people like, can they actually

I: Handle it

R: Handle more

I: Yeah

R: Yeah, yeah, can they handle more of it. Mmm. Because ultimately the work life balance really is the responsibility of the individual. But of course the company

I: Yeah

R: And you know from my perspective the company has to be watching out that you're not overworking anybody.

I: Yes, yeah, yeah

R: I'm probably talking way too long am I?

I: No that's that's great. Mmm.

R: It's hard though because in Irish Cement like it is a work hard play hard kind of place you know. And I don't know, people do work, they do work long hours.

I: But are they-

R: But do you know if you ask somebody

I: Opportunities there as well

R: Oh yeah yeah yeah. I mean okay. But if you, if you ask people in general the type of comments that would have come back to me is that the company will look after you, you know. Now I don't know since the recession people believe that as much but even mmm you know if the person has a sick child or has to go home early or anything, like there's no questions asked. And that's men and women. Do you know what I mean. I think, and that's at no matter what level you are in the company.

I: And that's <#######################>

R: And I'm not talking about now terminally ill, I'm just saying like if your child had chicken pox and you had to go home or you

I: Yeah, yeah, yeah

R: I think you know you would have seen that when you're HR on the ground and people to do try to help each other out

I: Yeah, yeah

R: In general. Ahh. And maybe that goes on in every company I don't know but it's certainly something that has been commented to me on. That it has been a great place to, you know to

I: <######################> To know that that's behind you.

R: Yeah. And people I think pay you back then for that as well. Do you know what I mean. They work hard because they know there is a support there you know.

I: And it works for the company as well

R: Yeah

I: I have no other questions, is there anything else that you want to add or anything. I think that

R: No, really it's just I suppose work life balance for me I think it's actually, I think it's actually quite a big thing. And I do worry a lot, not worry a lot, but I, I would be acutely aware that some people you know are working too late, too long, you know that they're not, like work is work and, the really successful guys are able to:-

I: Manage it

R: manage their work life balance you know and they, maybe they have very supportive spouses

I: Family behind them

R: or you know family behind them but ahh again like I mean, yeah, yeah.

I: <######################>support themselves

R: They certainly I don't know, I certainly would have felt, it's different now, things are a bit different now, <######################> are tighter but you know I mean you probably found it in the works<######################>. People would be knocking on your door all the time.

I: Yeah, yeah

R: And you would do whatever you could to try and help them out. Depending on the person if you knew someone was chancing their arm but in general people are straight up and

I: Honest and open and

R: Yeah

I: Yeah but if you take the approach to help them as much as you can

R: Yeah

I: But, yeah

R: But how good is our work life balance in the company in total, or as a whole, I don't know, 'cos the people I would be thinking about now, you know the people who spring to mind with me now would be the people who have a lot of responsibility on their shoulders and have, they have to juggle a lot in a:-

I: Should there be something formalised for them, do you think?

R: Well I think the company is:-

I: In terms

R: very important to either help them, help them in any way that they probably can, which may simply mean that you're helping them to say no to doing things or may help, or helping them to prioritise a bit more or delegate a bit more

I: Yeah, yeah

R: But a lot of that, you wouldn't really get into the position, you wouldn't really be appointed into the position if you weren't able to

I: To actually manage that in the first place

R: No.

I: Okay. Right.

R: Yeah

I: We'll finish it there. Thanks very much.

END of interview

Name;
Role;   **Operations Manager**
Location;   **Platin Works**
Setting;   **Office**
Interview Group;   **B. Reference 3B.**
Date;   **Thursday 15th August 2013**
Time;   **3:00pm**

I: Interview recorded for the thesis Work Life Balance, National College of Ireland with Pat Creagh on the 15th August. Thanks Pat for participating. So I'll discuss briefly about work-life balance practice and a little about the background behind initiatives and the reasons for them and also about older workers. So, I suppose just to kick it off, how would you describe the work-life balance practices in operation in Irish Cement.

R: It's an informal practice in a way but I would say in general the work life balance from my own experience working outside Irish Cement and in Irish Cement I think it's pretty good, pretty reasonable, you know. I think it's reflective of what's required and yet it's also reflective of having a pretty good balance, you know.

I: Do you think the employment practices works for the type of operation we have?

R: I would see it being one very much one of our strength. You know, I think it's required for the type of industry that we have, but equally I think, you know, it works very well with the guys and I think you get a very good response and support from them and equally I think it works from their point of view, you know, so. I, generally, I would have, I suppose, positive things to say really, to be honest with you, would be my view –

I: And what do you think the main type of initiatives that employees benefit from, or avail of?

R: In terms of which now?

I: In terms of maybe, you know, leave. Obviously we have a sick pay scheme there, we have the employee assistance programme, we have health checks, we have, I suppose there's a lot of flexibility then amongst departments and their supervisors and managers, you know –

R: Like, I suppose, I suppose all of what you mentioned there, we're looking at them, the screenings, the health screenings which I actually meant to speak to you about arranging for the year end again. So, we need to go ahead and do that. But, like that's just to mention one, right. But, I think overall you know there is a very good relationship between the supervisors, the managers and the supervisors and the general employees and so on. There is a reasonable amount of flexibility there, you know, in terms of giving guys holidays when they require them, whether it be even sick leave, you know. I think with regard to the sick leave scheme I think it works pretty well but still has to be managed pretty tightly that it's not abused. But on the assumption that it's not abused I think it works, it

works for both parties again, you know. But it is something that does need to be policed on an ongoing basis.

I: What do you think, would there be factors in terms of maybe that why these things are introduced or what keeps them ticking along, why do we; is it communication between management and employees or is it --?

R: Well, if the truth be known, again I suppose to be straight enough about it, I think some of them have built up over time, ok. And I would say on a fairly regular basis you would sit down and you would question as to should we change some of these things, you know. And do they still bring the benefit that they might have done some time ago. My general feeling would be, is that by and large they do bring a lot of goodwill; you do get a lot of; I think we have been through a difficult time over the last whatever year, two years in particular but yet to be fair, like, you know, the guys and the commitment that they give, particularly out of hours, is phenomenal, you know? And again, you can't generalise that for everybody, but the vast majority of guys here give Irish Cement a tremendous ---

I: Is that for call-ins and things like that?

R: Yeah, for call-ins, for breakdowns, for you know even; it ripples right through the whole plant, like, from if you take a driver that comes in here out of normal hours and he has a problem, you know, the guys will ring the Dispatch Operator, he'll come in and he'll have him out like, you know?

I: Yeah, yeah.

R: Over and above like say beyond normal duties. You can use that same scenario right through the way, through the crafts, right through with the supervisors, you know what I mean. So, I think we have a tremendous loyalty and a tremendous commitment from the employees, so what generates that? And I would say myself a lot of it is the culture and the various things that we have spoken about there, whether it be, you know, reasonable flexibility with holidays, you know partly the sick pay scheme, partly the health checks, you know. And that's not even to mention a few items, like you know. That whole culture and those parts add in to make up the mix of what the culture that we have and I think that culture is key in terms of getting the commitment and getting the support that we get from the employees. And as I say on a reasonable basis or on a reasonable timely basis we would review, you know, should we go and change our sick scheme, not to pay anybody, you know, because it is at the discretion of the company and if guys abuse it obviously, that's clearly communicated to them and where appropriate obviously they're removes from it. But as I say I think it's a combination of all these things combined together that creates the work ethic and the culture that really, you know, guys go over and above beyond what I've seen elsewhere. In other –

I: In other organisations.

R: Two organisations that I've worked in. So, that works well.

I: And do you think that this has had a benefit in terms of, for the organisation in terms of productivity?

R: I'd say hugely, I would say, to be fair, like. You know, ultimately a guy needs to be of positive frame of mind to get work out of him, you know. Ok, in the

industry that we're in, we're not in a production line as such, you know, where the guys have to do so many repetitive tasks. We're not in that environment; we're in an environment where you know, each minute to minute of every shift can be actually quite different and you require a guy to use his own initiative quite a bit and also you know, for him to get involved and really a guy needs to be very motivated, in my view, to be productive to do what you want him to do in our industry and our environment. So, again a lot of that is very important, you know, in terms of the things we spoke about, in terms of ensuring that guys remain motivated.

I: You mentioned absence there; do you think having this flexibility and you mentioned loyalty and commitment that this has decreased absence, or in a way, putting aside maybe longterm absences or absences that are caused by, you know, health issues?

R: Yeah, if you take --- like as you are aware yourself, like, you know what I mean, like, when we look at the absences, like, again from a Limerick point of view I think it's phenomenal the level of absences, they're so low. If you take Platin they're slightly higher, but when you go and actually analyse that and you take out a couple of the longterm sick guys the actual amount of kind of casual absences is actually quite low, you know. But again, that's a combination of policing and a combination of, you know, my view is that if the guys don't abuse the system, there's every reason to maintain it while if they do abuse it, well then, you know, obviously it comes under the spotlight as well. So, it's in their own interest not to abuse it, and I think there's a certain amount of kind of self policing amongst the guys not to abuse it as well. So, I think it works reasonably well, yeah.

I: You mentioned there, there's been a lot going on in the past couple of years. Just taking in maybe external factors that have maybe influenced what's happened here in the organisation, what have been the couple of major factors that have influenced the organisation in the last two years?

R: Well, if you take, if you take obviously a look from our point of view really the changes really commenced in my view since kind of the beginning of 2009, ok. So, it's been going now for near 4 years, ok. And I would say that we have gone through a huge, huge transformation in the last four years. What are the single biggest changes? I would say, you know, prior to that we would have been under a lot of pressure in terms of producing volumes and so on and I would have said is that we would have liked to implement some changes that may have had a very good chance, but we were a little bit reluctant to do it. So, for me the external, the external pressures really were the impetus to get us to go and implement various changes which in some respect needed to be done anyway. But certainly I think it was the impetus for us to go and do it. And like if you look at the level of restructuring, re-organising, you know reducing the total number of employees, reducing or improving the efficiency and the efficient use of people, like it's been phenomenal in my view what we have done and you know I can pick any examples throughout the whole plant but like you take you know in general the comment I would say is is that you know it took us a significant portion of time to sit down, to explain to the guys what we wanted to do. Their initial reaction was, it can't be done. Alright. And then, after a lot of convincing, after a lot of talking and so on they are now today doing what they said they could never do. And, you know, you can pick various areas throughout the whole plant and I think that has been a huge transformation and I think you know, certainly we are a much, much better, leaner, fitter organisation than what we would have been four years ago.

I: Four years ago, yeah. Do you think these changes have had a big influence on employees' work life balance, in terms of --?

R: I would say not. When you say to me work life balance, you know, my view in life is is that you know, you work for so many hours per week and then you are off for so many hours per week. I think this restructuring, what it has done is that it has arguably even improved it because you know when the guys are here, they're not here longer, ok. I just think that they're being challenged more and they are also having to be more productive when they're actually here on site as opposed to being here longer and I would like to think that you know guys get more reward from their work because it's more challenging and its more variable and so on for them. So, you know, in my head is that if a guy is enjoying himself and being challenged a little bit more at work, that actually helps the balance and certainly are not in the place longer, so you know –

I: The balance is still there –

R: The balance is still there and I think you know it might improve things for them because you know if you are happy at work that's important as well, I suppose.

I: And has the company changed their view to any of these flexibilities or initiatives with the changes that have happened? Are there –

R: No, no, not. I would say possibly some of them maybe around the peripheral. But in principle, like they co-work, they have unrestricted access or, but no, no

I: rather than new initiatives or anything like that –

R: No, like, if you say, if you take the key ones that we would have like, you know. Let them be the health screening or that. Like the ones that we've mentioned, like fundamentally they're all the same. So, in that sense I would say no. You know, the whole focus really was about upskilling guys, getting them to do multi-tasking, you know. But fundamentally –

I: It remains the same.

R: Yeah, yeah.

I: Just in terms of older workers then, I know in the past few years there's been a big change, reduction in numbers of older workers with retirement schemes and so on. Has there ever been any initiative unique to older workers, and I'm talking guys who are 55 + and this could be for example, a guy comes off shift or maybe reduces the number of working days or working hours per week from say 39 to 30, or?

I: Well, I would say like again my short answer to that would be, you know, again the view is that can a guy do the job, you know what I mean, whether he's 25 or 64 or whatever, you know what I mean. If a guy is capable of doing a job and is doing the job, he's doing the job, like. It's not dependent on his age, you know what I mean, to be fair. The only thing I would say is that if you take a look at the last number of years obviously we've had like early retirement schemes and so on in terms of reducing our numbers and that is really a means of trying to do with, I suppose, to minimise the impact on the workers across the board, like, from my

point of view, you know I would say we wouldn't have any deliberate policy, you know, to cater for a guy who's getting maybe on a little bit in years.

I: Do you think this is something we consider in the future, when guys start coming around to that age again and another group of them --?

R: Possibly, I suppose. Again, what I would say is that from my point of view like, you know, the guys that have gone out on the early retirement scheme have taken a huge, a huge amount of knowledge with them. You know what I mean, like. And we have that bit of a knowledge gap which we now we're having to get back up the ladder again in some areas in particular. So, like, you know, my view guys of 55 and 60 and so on –

I: Do you think some initiative there to try and record that knowledge, like some organisations have used a database, or, --

R: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

I: or type of a handover record

R: I suppose and the way we've even tried to do it at times is like we've kind of brought back some of the older guys even on a temporary basis, you know what I mean, to try and regain some of the knowledge, like. And we had a couple of specific projects last year where we did bring back some of these guys that had gone out on early retirement and it works particularly well. And like we've even used some of them throughout CRH. Like, we have some of the guys here that went out on early retirement and we have them involved in some of our other operations across Europe today. You know what I mean.

I: Would that be mainly to pass on knowledge to other guys?

R: Correct and right. Absolutely like. That's the primary focus. Again, I won't go naming specific people but that's, that's absolutely the requirement for them. So not alone have we brought them back into Irish Cement but we've also used them throughout CRH because they have a wealth of knowledge and, and certainly to take your point, you know, I think it's something that we should look at in terms of how we transfer the knowledge. But I suppose, you know, our approach has been to nearly try and bring these guys back on a somewhat temporary basis because really the knowledge they have is invaluable in my view. So, rather than learning the lessons the hard way again, it's a lot more effective to tap into the knowledge that these guys have, you know.

I: And in your experience here in the organisation has there ever been any requests for workers to, you know, maybe change their working structure to suit their life, especially the older guys; have there ever been any requests like that?

R: Not particularly, no, like. You might have had one or two I suppose on health grounds, but you know like, but not because they were, not because of their age and you could even add some young people that wanted to change their job because of their health situation or whatever, or maybe their own personal family situation, but not on the basis of age I am not aware of anybody who has come and approached us on that basis.

I: OK. So, I suppose in the changes that have occurred in the past few years has there been in - maybe more a HR question in terms they may be recording it - but

an increase in the number of people availing of leave or holidays or trying to get more flexibilities in their role with say for example a lot of other parents or wives are working as well and there's guys trying to ---

R: Yeah, we've had a little bit of that I suppose alright, you know. But that in my view has been there anyway, you know what I mean. But again you must remember, like, the industry that we're in you know obviously we're a 24/7 operation, you know, so it's not like we can do some jobs 3 days a week or 2 days a week. You can do it in some specific applications or some areas, but not everywhere for sure. But we've always had some requests like that and again we try and facilitate it and structure it where possible, like you know. We do have some people on shorter hour working weeks but you know, it's difficult in the environment that we're operating in, but certainly we try and accommodate it where we can. We've always had some requests. I wouldn't say it has increased over the last 2 or 3 years because of the restructuring and that, to be honest. We've always had some requests for that and I'd say there are still some requests for that and we accommodate it where possible.

I: And do you think employees, just to finish up. Do employees recognise the company's efforts in terms of trying to accommodate this?

R: Again, again I would say you know, if you take an individual that's coming in isolation and he's looking for something, you have to deal with it on an employee to employee basis, you know. Does an employee appreciate the company? I would say they probably do. But equally, I would say you know that they probably understand that there is some limitations there as well.

I: Yeah, ok. That's really it. Thanks very much.

R: Very good.

END of Interview

J. Survey questions

Work-Life Balance - programmes and awareness amongst HR Professionals

'Work-life balance refers to the sense of balance and satisfaction employees experience between their work / professional and personal lives'. Grady et al 2008.

1. How many people are currently employed in your organisation?

- ☐ 1 to 49
- ☐ 50 to 99
- ☐ 100 to 199
- ☐ 200 to 299
- ☐ 300 to 399
- ☐ 400 to 499
- ☐ 500 to 1000
- ☐ 1000 +

2. What sector is your organisation in?

- ☐ Public
- ☐ Private

3. How many years have you been working as a HR Professional?

- ☐ 1 to 4 years
- ☐ 5 to 9
- ☐ 10 to 14
- ☐ 15 to 20
- ☐ 20 to 24
- ☐ 25 to 29
- ☐ 30 to 34
- ☐ 35+

4. Are you male or female?

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female

5. Which of the following Work-life balance initiatives does your organisation have?

☐ Part-time working

☐ Flexi-time

☐ Holidays/paid time off

☐ Career breaks

☐ Weekend and evening working

☐ Job-sharing

☐ Time-off for family engagements/events

☐ Short-term contracts

☐ Working from home

☐ Term-time contracts

☐ None of the above

☐ Other (please specify)

6. Do you think the various Work-life balance initiatives assist the organisation in achieving its strategy and competitive advantage?

⭘ Yes

⭘ No

<div align="center">✱</div>

7. In your opinion, which of the following are the main benefits in operating a Work-life balance programme?

▾	Increase productivity of employees
▾	Increase retention of employees
▾	Create a positive culture in the organisation
▾	Increase commitment and motivation
▾	Increase well-being of employees
▾	As an advantage in attracting and retaining staff

8. Does your organisation have a formal Work-life balance programme in place for its employees?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Not sure

9. Are Work-life balance initiatives promoted within your organisation?

☐ Heavily promoted

☐ Regularly promoted

☐ Rarely promoted

☐ Never promoted

10. What level of awareness do managers and employees have of Work-life balance programmes?

☐ Very high

☐ High

☐ Satisfactory

☐ Low

☐ Very low

Other (please specify) [_____]

11. How often do employees avail of Work-life balance programmes?

☐ All the time

☐ Sometimes

☐ Regularly

☐ Rarely

☐ Never

Other (please specify) [_____]

12. Who administers the Work-life balance programme and initiatives?

- ☐ HR Department
- ☐ Line Manager
- ☐ HR Administrator
- ☐ Supervisors
- ☐ HR Manager
- ☐ Operations Manager
- ☐ Other (please specify)

[   ]

13. Does your organisation have flexible working initiatives particularly for older workers?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't know

14. In your opinion, does an employees well-being increase if they have sufficient amount of time available for work and personal life?

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

15. Please leave any additional comments in the box below.

[   ]

[Done]

K. Summary of Survey results

Work-Life Balance initiatives and awareness amongst HR Professionals

SurveyMonkey

1. Approximately how many people are employed in your organisation?

		Response Percent	Response Count
1 to 100		37.8%	34
100 to 300		18.9%	17
300 to 500		8.9%	8
500 to 1000		12.2%	11
1000 to 2000		4.4%	4
2000+		17.8%	16
		answered question	90
		skipped question	1
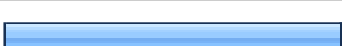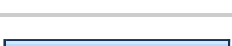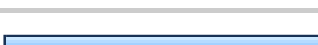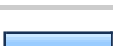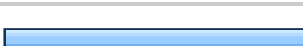
2. Approximately what percentage of your workforce are older workers, aged 55-64?

		Response Percent	Response Count
0%		12.6%	11
0 - 10%		35.6%	31
10 - 20%		26.4%	23
20 - 50%		18.4%	16
50 - 70%		3.4%	3
70 - 90%		0.0%	0
+90%		3.4%	3
		answered question	87
		skipped question	4

3. What sector is your organisation in?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Public		14.8%	13
Private		**85.2%**	**75**
		answered question	88
		skipped question	3

4. Which of the following Work-life balance initiatives does your organisation have?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Part-time working		**68.5%**	**61**
Flexi-time		53.9%	48
Career breaks		27.0%	24
Weekend and evening working		38.2%	34
Job-sharing		22.5%	20
Time-off for family engagements/events		51.7%	46
Short-term contracts		36.0%	32
Working from home		50.6%	45
Term-time contracts		16.9%	15
Employee Assistance Programme		48.3%	43
Chidcare facilities		4.5%	4
Education fee support		49.4%	44
Other (please specify)		9.0%	8
		answered question	89
		skipped question	2

5. Do you think the various Work-life balance initiatives assist the organisation in achieving its strategy and competitive advantage?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		89.9%	80
No		10.1%	9
		answered question	89
		skipped question	2

6. Rate the following benefits of Work-life balance initiatives in order of importance to your organisation, with 1 being the Most Important and 6 being the Least Important.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	Rating Average	Rating Count
Increased productivity	25.0% (22)	**28.4% (25)**	22.7% (20)	6.8% (6)	8.0% (7)	9.1% (8)	2.72	88
Retention of employees	**43.8% (39)**	28.1% (25)	10.1% (9)	1.1% (1)	10.1% (9)	6.7% (6)	2.26	89
Lower absenteeism	22.5% (20)	19.1% (17)	**23.6% (21)**	14.6% (13)	5.6% (5)	14.6% (13)	3.06	89
Attracting staff	**19.5% (17)**	**19.5% (17)**	17.2% (15)	13.8% (12)	13.8% (12)	16.1% (14)	3.31	87
Increase commitment and motivation	**28.1% (25)**	**28.1% (25)**	14.6% (13)	9.0% (8)	14.6% (13)	5.6% (5)	2.71	89
Greater co-operation and flexibility	21.3% (19)	**25.8% (23)**	20.2% (18)	11.2% (10)	11.2% (10)	10.1% (9)	2.96	89
						answered question		89
						skipped question		2

7. What level of awareness do managers and employees have of Work-life balance initiatives?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Very high		15.6%	14
High		30.0%	27
Satisfactory		**37.8%**	**34**
Low		13.3%	12
Very low		3.3%	3
		answered question	90
		skipped question	1

8. Are Work-life balance initiatives promoted within your organisation?

		Response Percent	Response Count
All the time		8.0%	7
Frequently		22.7%	20
Sometimes		**40.9%**	**36**
Rarely		20.5%	18
Never		8.0%	7
		answered question	88
		skipped question	3
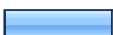
9. How often do employees avail of the Work-life balance initiatives?

		Response Percent	Response Count
All the time		14.4%	13
Frequently		28.9%	26
Sometimes		**37.8%**	**34**
Rarely		16.7%	15
Never		2.2%	2
		answered question	90
		skipped question	1

10. Does your organisation operate a formal or informal Work-life balance practice for its employees?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Formal		25.3%	22
Informal		**74.7%**	**65**
		answered question	87
		skipped question	4
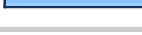
11. Who administers the Work-life balance initiatives?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Line Manager		46.1%	41
Supervisor		9.0%	8
HR Manager		**56.2%**	**50**
Payroll Officer		2.2%	2
Other (please specify)		16.9%	15
		answered question	89
		skipped question	2
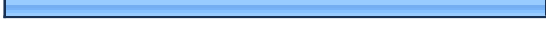
12. In your opinion, what are the main benefits of retaining or employing older workers, aged 55-64?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Experience		**85.6%**	**77**
Value and knowledge		84.4%	76
Enhanced competitiveness		3.3%	3
Loyalty and reliability		47.8%	43
Benefits for customer relationships		42.2%	38
Other (please specify)		3.3%	3
		answered question	90
		skipped question	1

13. What disadvantages would you associate with employing or retaining older workers?

|		Response Percent	Response Count
Health issues		29.4%	25
Re-training costs		16.5%	14
Outdated skills		**55.3%**	**47**
Decline in productivity		24.7%	21
Lack of flexibility and adapability		40.0%	34
Higher absenteeism		5.9%	5
Cost to employ		22.4%	19
Other (please specify)		9.4%	8
		answered question	85
		skipped question	6

14. Does your organisation have Work-life balance initiatives particularly for older workers, aged 55-64?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		12.4%	11
No		**87.6%**	**78**
		answered question	89
		skipped question	2

15. Which of the following Work-life balance initiatives are primarily availed of by older workers?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Part-time working		**53.3%**	**40**
Flexi-time		40.0%	30
Career breaks		10.7%	8
Weekend and evening working		17.3%	13
Job-sharing		14.7%	11
Time-off for family engagements/events		33.3%	25
Short-term contracts		10.7%	8
Working from home		30.7%	23
Term-time contracts		4.0%	3
Employee Assistance Programme		17.3%	13
Chidcare facilities		2.7%	2
Education fee support		6.7%	5
Other (please specify)		9.3%	7
	answered question		75
	skipped question		16

16. Please leave any additional comments in the box below. Thank you for your time.

	Response Count
	11
answered question	11
skipped question	80

Q4.	Which of the following Work-life balance initiatives does your organisation have?	
1	This depends on the role. Academics have flexibility vs admin staff home working etc may not be an option.	Jul 26, 2013 12:28 AM
2	None of the above	Jul 25, 2013 2:53 PM
3	Gym and swimming pool facilities	Jul 20, 2013 2:23 PM
4	Part sponsored education and time off for study/exams	Jul 18, 2013 3:28 PM
5	Wellness workshops quarterly	Jul 18, 2013 3:23 PM
6	self-employment	Jul 18, 2013 3:07 PM
7	Summer hours - from May to Sept inclusive, once weekly hours are completed then every employee can leave from 12noon on Friday	Jul 18, 2013 2:40 PM
8	promotion of health & wellbeing, 1 extra day's leave to do something important	Jul 14, 2013 9:59 PM

	Q11. Who administers the Work-life balance initiatives?	
1	Managing Director	Jul 26, 2013 5:35 PM
2	Managing Director	Jul 26, 2013 9:12 AM
3	employees	Jul 25, 2013 2:53 PM
4	Society board	Jul 21, 2013 12:17 AM
5	MD	Jul 20, 2013 2:12 PM
6	NA	Jul 20, 2013 9:42 AM
7	ceo	Jul 19, 2013 9:27 AM
8	Managing Director	Jul 19, 2013 8:55 AM
9	GM	Jul 18, 2013 5:41 PM
10	Director	Jul 18, 2013 4:26 PM
11	MD / Admin Director	Jul 18, 2013 3:23 PM
12	Director	Jul 18, 2013 3:07 PM
13	there are only 2 of us and we are partners	Jul 18, 2013 2:56 PM
14	GM	Jul 18, 2013 2:54 PM
15	managing director	Jul 18, 2013 2:45 PM

	Q12. In your opinion, what are the main benefits of retaining or employing older workers, aged 55-64?	
1	Balance of ages/demographics	Aug 1, 2013 2:17 PM
2	No difference; if they're the right person for the job then the age is not an issue to consider	Jul 19, 2013 9:27 AM
3	Our line of work has interaction with difficult circumstances and older workers generally are more "level headed"	Jul 18, 2013 3:23 PM

Q13. What disadvantages would you associate with employing or retaining older workers?

1	I do see a disadvantage in retaining an older worker	Aug 1, 2013 10:05 PM
2	Flexibilityb depends on the individual, no retraining costs if development is ongoing and attached to performance mgmt.	Jul 26, 2013 12:28 AM
3	The list above could also be associated with younger employees	Jul 21, 2013 9:19 PM
4	Again, once they are the right person for the job.	Jul 19, 2013 9:27 AM
5	None	Jul 18, 2013 3:19 PM
6	Harder to perform physical demanding jobs	Jul 18, 2013 2:54 PM
7	pension issue?	Jul 18, 2013 2:45 PM
8	Very dependent on the person. Think health is irrelevant (social healthcare available here), absenteeisn also and decline in productivity (role dependent if highly manual)	Jul 15, 2013 4:59 PM

Q15. Which of the following Work-life balance initiatives are primarily availed of by older workers?

1	Not applicable - none in this category	Jul 26, 2013 5:35 PM
2	Depends on the role. Some roles can't offer flexibility at certain times e.g. academics during term time, payroll at end of month etc.	Jul 26, 2013 12:28 AM
3	Not sure	Jul 21, 2013 9:19 PM
4	dont know	Jul 20, 2013 9:42 AM
5	We only have one at the moment and that is a female under 40 who has returned after 1 year maternity leave and now working 3 days a week.	Jul 19, 2013 8:55 AM
6	Nothing in particular that other employees would not avail of	Jul 18, 2013 4:23 PM
7	I don't know	Jul 18, 2013 3:19 PM

Q16.	**Please leave any additional comments in the box below. Thank you for your time.**	
1	Unless there is a culture of flexibility in an organisation, many of the examples listed will never be available to employees, despite possible benefits to the organisation/people. Good luck, Ed.	Aug 1, 2013 2:17 PM
2	Ed, Problem here is that any of the work-life balances that company has seem to be more to do with the need of a person and the desire of the company to retain that individual. (eg - I work flexi time but really I'm the only one with that facility). As a result I've left question 15 blank - any of the guys we have that are over 58 haven't actually pushed the boat out to get work-life items for themselves. Biggest work/life balances item that I'm aware all will get is time off if something comes up (eg kid starting school, dentist appointment, collect kids on a particular day etc) but these are all short items. A wedding etc would be a days holiday rather than a gimme. Hope that helps, Sarah	Jul 29, 2013 3:53 PM
3	This survey highlights the range of work life balance initiatives that may be employed in the workplace. It would be useful to know what trends and insights come out of this study. In particular, to what extent does cost have a bearing on decisions to introduce such initiatives, and how is this balanced by the benefits that accrue from their introduction.	Jul 27, 2013 8:51 AM
4	We are a small workforce of 5 employees so there are no formal arrangements arranged. I believe that if our workforce was to grow then there would be a need to formalise the policies.	Jul 22, 2013 11:12 AM
5	Best of luck with getting your Masters Ed.	Jul 21, 2013 12:17 AM
6	I believe that my company could do more for older employees. The same work life balance initiatives apply to all type of employees, no matter what age they have.	Jul 20, 2013 2:23 PM
7	Formal work-life balance initiatives are coming on-stream in our company following a staff survey. The company demographic is very young so it's unlikely that initiatives would be specifically designed for the older workers (AKA board members). I'm not in the HR department so the answers above are from the point of view of an employee on the receiving end of the initiatives.	Jul 19, 2013 7:59 AM
8	Just to note our organisation provides health & wellbeing support services and so we are inherently aware of the benefits of wlb - we are simply practicing what we breach re employee wellness initiatives.	Jul 18, 2013 3:23 PM
9	There are only 2 of us and we are self employed as partners in the company. By necessity we are flexible	Jul 18, 2013 2:56 PM
10	It is very important for our Company to retain older workers as there is a shortage of educated younger inspectors (workers)	Jul 18, 2013 2:54 PM
11	As I am self employed, the answers may skew your overall findings but I am a complete advocate of Work/Life Balance initiatives and of the value of older workers and promote this in my work in organisations	Jul 18, 2013 2:45 PM